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CANCER & THE ART OF HEALING

Marilyn Hundleby PhD & Sherry Abbott



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CANCER & THE ART OF HEALING

Marilyn Hundleby PhD & Sherry Abbott

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Fabric art by Linda
A gift from the artist

With grateful hearts, we dedicate this book to Donna Cipin. Faced with the challenges of breast cancer, Donna was inspired by her participation in a support group for women. Donna's family and friends also benefited from the emotional support and caring that is so important when a loved one is diagnosed with cancer. Donna's husband Reuben, along with their children Jeffrey, Jacqui, Caralyn, Marla and Jennifer, and Donna's many friends, established the Donna Cipin Fund (Alberta Cancer Foundation) in her memory. This fund provided encouragement and initial financial support for Cancer & the Art of Healing.



WHAT ARTISTS KNOW

The expressive arts inspire and influence us in all areas of our lives. Over the past decade, people with cancer have participated in Arts in Medicine Programs across Canada, embracing life and healing through the self-empowering act of creativity. In workshops that range from sculpting to soapstone carving, from photography to painting, from fibre

arts to beadwork, cancer patients as well as caregivers, family members, health care professionals and volunteers have discovered what artists have known for centuries: the creative process is liberating to the body, and uplifting to the mind and spirit.

I am delighted that professional artists – local, national and international – are invited to teach these Arts in Medicine programs. I applaud their willingness to share their professional expertise with individuals from all walks of life who are faced with the challenges of a cancer diagnosis and treatment.

Cancer & the Art of Healing poignantly illustrates the power of creativity in our lives. This book is an uplifting gift that is sure to inspire and connect you to that inner place where creativity and healing dwell. It is a gift of images, insights and stories told through the voices of those who have experienced cancer first-hand. It is also an inspiring reminder of the power of art in our lives.

Karen Kain

Chair, Canada Council for the Arts

Artistic Director, National Ballet of Canada

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Our heartfelt thanks go to Dr. Jean-Michel Turc (President & CEO, Alberta Cancer Board), Gary Campbell (Chairman, ACB), Dr. A.L.A. Fields (Vice President Medical Affairs and Community Oncology, ACB), Dr. Carol Cass (Vice President, ACB; Director, Cross Cancer Institute), Linda Mickelson (CEO, Alberta Cancer Foundation), Jane Weller (Director of Development Northern Alberta, ACF) and Shirley Roozen (Director of Corporate Affairs, ACB) for your encouragement and support. As well, we thank the many dedicated people within the Department of Psychosocial and Spiritual Resources at the Cross Cancer Institute: Dr. Rami Sela (Director), for his continued support of this work; Marilyn Gilker for her unending devotion to Arts in Medicine; and Carolyn Husky, Lorie Grundy, Bonnie Burwash and all of the artists and facilitators who work in the program each week. Our thanks to Dr. Ceinwen Cumming for her work with focus groups and editing materials related to the Arts in Medicine Program. We appreciate the secretarial staff for their continuing assistance: Shelly McKinnon, Coralie Leshner, Corrine Jacobsen and Tammie Yuhar. We also wish to thank Cynthia Passmore-McLaughlin, Caroline Kolompar, Pat Gilker, Mark Smyka, Helen Reilly and Xerox Canada Ltd: Your assistance has been tremendous.

We especially want to thank the many patients and family members, caregivers, health care professionals, volunteers and artists who have worked together so passionately within the Arts in Medicine Program. Your willingness to share in this book, of yourselves and your work, is a gift in itself. Through your efforts and contributions, we are now able to make the experience of Arts in Medicine available to many more people whose lives are touched by cancer.

We thank all the artists who inspire us and give us beautiful images through which to see the world and to think about our own place in it.

We are grateful to Wei Yew for his friendship and for his superb talents as a graphic designer and in the field of publishing. Wei provided invaluable guidance during the last phases of the creation of this book. We thank Virginia Durksen, who brought not only her extensive skill as an editor, but also her encouragement and kindness as we worked to complete this project.

I am deeply grateful for my family. Thank you to my husband Glenn, my sister Alison and my father Kie, for being there in immeasurable ways.

Sherry and I thank our mothers, Margaret Irene Murray and Judith Carol Ann Clark, for their creativity. Their lessons of love continue to guide us.

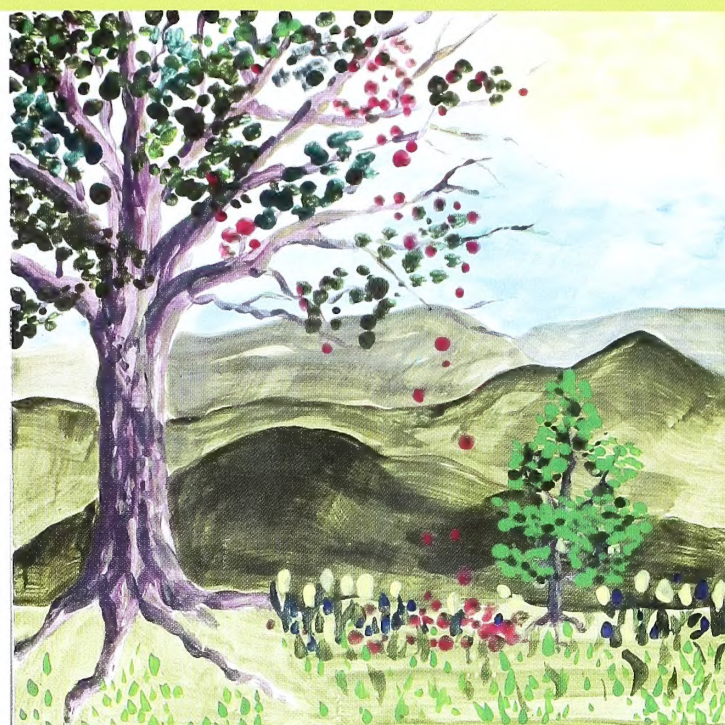
*We thank you all,
Marilyn Hundleby and Sherry Abbott*

Whatever the challenges we face in life, art can be a powerful source of inspiration and insight. Whether you participate in art as a viewer, as a reader or as a creator, the experience of creative expression provides an opportunity for gaining insight into our unique human journey, in all its complexity.

Cancer & the Art of Healing is designed to honour the courage and wisdom of individuals who have faced the extraordinary experience of cancer and have found emotional and spiritual healing through the creative process. We invite you to read their stories.

Most participants in Arts in Medicine classes do not think of themselves as “artists.” Yet, by taking that first tentative step, they have been introduced to their creative side, the artist that resides in each of us. As they reflect on their Arts in Medicine experience, participants often observe that skilled guidance from the group facilitator as well as the support and insights of the group members were helpful to their own moments of insight. Not everyone has access to an Arts in Medicine program. Therefore, we invite you to think of each and every contributor to this book as part of your very own support group.

The process of healing the whole person is as individual as the process of creativity. Such healing includes the very best in medical care and treatment, along with special attention to emotional and spiritual well-being. Emotional and spiritual healing can be found through the support of family and friends in times of personal crisis. It is also something each one of us can find within ourselves, through our own experience of creative expression. We hope that this book inspires you to find creative resources for your personal healing journey.



Tile by Shelley

We must emphasize that in the Arts in Medicine programs represented in this book, a psychologist, social worker or art therapist works with an artist-instructor to guide each class. Chartered psychologists and clinical social workers are available through cancer treatment centres in most communities to help support healing.

Compiling an art exhibit that includes artists of all ages, with widely ranging skill levels and working in a variety of media, is an ambitious undertaking. To that mix we can add the unique circumstances in which this art was created – at Arts in Medicine workshops across Canada. It seemed like a good idea when we first conceived of this book five years ago, and it seems even more so today. Our greatest challenge has been to stop adding material to this collection while being continually awed by the creative works that reach us every week through Arts in Medicine classes. We hope you enjoy the exhibit.

芸術は楽

誰かこの企画の名を付けたいのか。

これ程びっぴりの名前はない。

仲間と一時を過すのは楽しい事。

まして何かは打込んで。

それか本末上る荷足感。

これ程の楽かどこにあるのか。

芸術にふける事は、最高の楽である。

バクスター 兵子



MAGNIFICENT MEDICINE

Who named this project?

It is just right (perfect).

Spending time together is fun.

Even more, throwing oneself into something,

accomplishes a nice feeling,

such a wonderful medicine I never knew existed.

Art is magnificent medicine.

Hyoko Baxter

Arts in Medicine participant



Tile by Shelley

The Art of Healing

Cancer & the Art of Healing is a gift to inspire and lead you on a journey of emotional and spiritual healing. The power of this gift can guide you to work out your own pathways to healing. The artists and storytellers in this book used their inherent creativity – a creativity often previously unacknowledged or unexplored – to help them focus on restoring their health while dealing with a difficult time in their lives. Many of these individuals were inspired by the knowledge that through sharing their stories and artwork they may also encourage others in similar circumstances.

Images are a powerful means of communication. Nevertheless, it is the act of creating that provides us with the greatest insight and can help us better understand ourselves. Even simple “stick drawn” images have the potential to help us experience the art of healing.

Our attitudes and beliefs can be used to achieve great things. They can also hold us back from discovering new directions and experiencing wonder in our lives. If we truly believe in ourselves and have the attitude that we can accomplish something, we usually do. When it comes to being artistic, the same logic applies. Whether you think you can or you can't, you're going to be right. All you need to do is set aside the time and seek the opportunity, and you will create.

Not everyone who has cancer is cured. But everyone who is diagnosed with cancer can experience healing. That journey often begins by opening ourselves to self-discovery. Our ability to observe and create beauty, both internally and externally, is part of that healing process. When we create, write and share our insights, this gift is evident not only to others but also to the artist. This spontaneous and often profound experience is the magnificent medicine that allows healing to begin.





Arts In Medicine

Over the years, we have found it difficult to explain what happens in Arts in Medicine classes. To a casual observer it may seem obvious that our purpose is to produce beautiful pieces of art. However, when participants write about their work, they often describe the experience of creating and the insights they have gained through the creative process.

Artists have known for years that the connection between mind, body and spirit is a powerful aspect of creativity. In Arts in Medicine classes we recognize and encourage this connection. When participants engage in the process of creating, they put themselves into their artwork. The piece can begin to take on personal attributes and in the end it speaks to, as well as for, the artist. Just as the created work becomes an extension of the artist, the act of creating becomes part of the artist's healing journey.

The insight and understanding garnered as each person creates art can be powerful. Participants slowly begin to see new possibilities, which can spring from their own innate creativity or from the creativity of others in the group. They are inspired to look at new ways to tackle a challenge or to see things from a fresh perspective. They are often surprised by the wellspring of wisdom, hope and resourcefulness they find inside. For many, the expansiveness of these feelings helps them come to terms with some of the more unhelpful thoughts and feelings they may have felt when first diagnosed with cancer.

We have found that this experience can be greatly enhanced by ensuring that a certain core structure is incorporated into each class:

- *Creating art together amplifies the richness of the experience.*

Whenever groups come together, gems of wisdom are revealed. We may think that brilliant thoughts come only from famous writers or recognized artists. Yet people

of all ages and from all walks of life express profoundly inspirational thoughts when given the opportunity to reflect on their experience. New learning can also reveal itself to others in the group simply through attentive listening and observation.

- *Journal writing provides a vital record of participants' insights.*

During the last thirty minutes of each two-hour class, participants are invited to write. In the beginning, most people would sooner avoid writing. As the weeks go by, they come to see the importance of self-reflection in the creative process. Participants are encouraged to focus on their thoughts and feelings as they work on their creative endeavours and to record these in their journal. This process of writing about their creative experience often leads to new insights about their present situation in life. Excerpts from the artist's journal have been included with most of the images in this book.

- *Classes are under the direction of a professional support person, in team with a caring instructor.*

Arts in Medicine classes are different from art programs offered in the general community. While beautiful works of art are in fact created, the important factor is the process whereby individuals experience themselves as they are creating. A psychologist, social worker or art therapist experienced in group dynamics facilitates each session. Instruction is provided by artists who are selected for their expertise, caring and selfless dedication to helping others. This team works together to ensure that participants are given time to write, to reflect and to share their personal experiences in the class.



- *Quality materials give a signal that the activity is worth doing.*

We have always believed that it is important to provide quality art materials. Participants often tell us that they have come to see this as a measure of how much they are valued. Having beautiful materials to work with, be they brushes, paints, beads or yarns, often leads people to see the beauty around them. Learning to observe small, yet wonderful things can make a big difference in how we feel each day. It could be light reflecting on trees, a leaf blowing across the grass or the changing colours in a sunrise that give us a feeling of excitement and exhilaration.

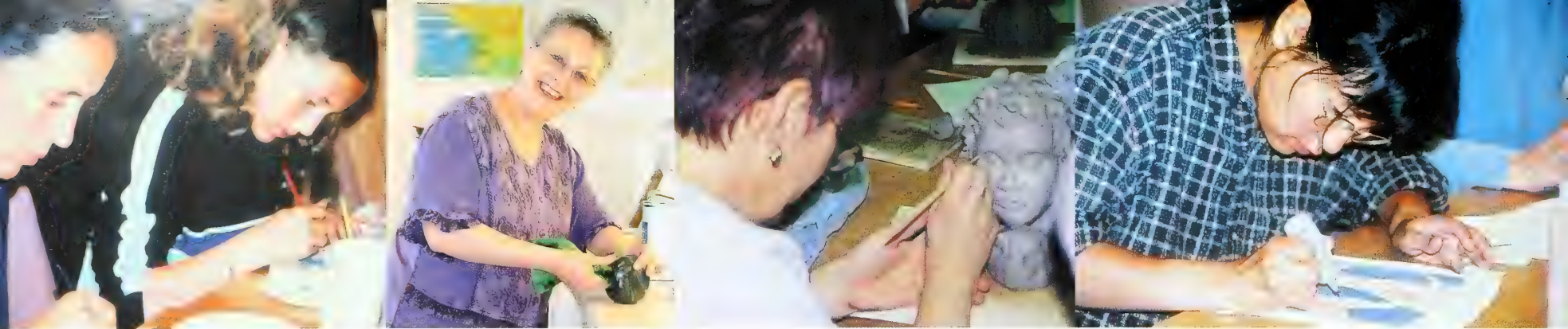
- *Programming is offered over a wide range of creative modalities.*

Participants need to find a creative medium that suits them. Not everyone aspires to carving a soapstone bear or sewing a storybook quilt square. We have incorporated painting icons, angels and mandalas for those who wish a quiet, meditative modality. People involved in the photography class tend to work by themselves and then share their photographs and stories in weekly sessions. Clay sculpture offers participants an opportunity to dig their hands into the clay and mould something of their very own. This tends to be a personal encounter between the sculptor and the clay.

- *Emphasis is placed on personal learning revealed through the creative process.*

Arts in Medicine is about people learning to heal their lives. It is not about keeping them occupied with crafts. Casual observers, struck by the beauty and quality of the work created, often ask whether these “crafts” can be purchased. The depth and importance of the process the participants went through is lost in any attempt to determine the work’s commercial value. When they are asked this question, they invariably reply, “I would never sell this work, because to me it is priceless!”

Through Arts in Medicine, individuals discover new ways to take charge of the emotional aspects of cancer, to grow from their experience and move on with their treatment and healing. This book shares the images and insights of patients, family members, health care providers, caregivers and volunteers who have experienced cancer. Their stories share a common theme: they are uplifting, hopeful and compassionate. Certainly, they attest to the learning, strength and healing that can be achieved through artistic and creative accomplishments.



Stories and Images

Every image in this book tells a story. In most cases, the artists have also reflected on how the image and the act of creating it relates to their healing journey. These brief excerpts are part of a much bigger story. They capture significant moments of insight that extend beyond illness to include memories and hopes, passion and purpose. Each story is told, just as each image was created, from the unique perspective and in the distinct voice of an individual whose life has been touched by cancer.

As Judy says in "Puddles and Rocks," we may find healing "in the least expected places." What binds these stories together is the discovery of "inner resources and strengths I didn't know I had," as Carole observes in "Cancer is No Hobby." Deanne's insight in "Nurturing the Soul" captures the essence of Arts in Medicine: "Medicine can treat the physical site, but the arts can nurture the soul to a state of health and well-being." We trust that you, too, will experience moments of recognition and discovery as you enjoy the images and stories that follow.



Puddles and Rock Photo by Janice



PUDDLES AND ROCKS

I think cancer may have an even stronger hold on individuals emotionally than it does physically. While the oncology team use their skills to battle the disease, we as patients must condition our minds towards healing. This is no easy task.

I noticed that one of the ladies in my class seemed to take a lot of pictures of puddles and rocks. Week after week, whenever she showed us her photographs there were always more images of puddles and rocks. I puzzled over this and wondered why she didn't take pictures of something pretty, like flowers. During these sessions we would write and share our thoughts. As I listened to her describe the colours and ripples, the formations and places where she found the puddles and rocks, I began to realize that they in fact did have a kind of essential beauty. She described the rocks as though they had feelings!

We do not know where or how we will find healing, and it may be in the least expected places. I thought about this a lot. What if I was a puddle and no one came to look at my lovely colours or enjoyed watching raindrops fall on me, causing ripple upon ripple, or no child splashed his feet in me or no car even drove through me? What if I just dried up and withered away? What if I was a rock and someone kicked me or threw me into a pile of rocks, never to be seen again? What sort of life would that be?

So, it is through this creative process we are learning not to sit at home in quiet desperation. We find hope, beauty and healing in each new day. We may have experienced cancer, but life is still precious and wonderful.

Judy

CANCER IS NO HOBBY

Some people may get the impression that what we have done here is make crafts. Believe me, I haven't passed through the doors of this Cancer Centre to learn a new hobby. The creative component in this supportive group took me on a personal journey of growth and discovery. I discovered abilities and talents that I never knew existed. I tapped into inner resources and strengths I didn't know I had. Don't confuse craftwork with cancer. Cancer is no hobby. Today, because of programs like Arts in Medicine, I am able to face cancer with a divine acceptance that keeps me marching on and makes me more fully alive than before.

Carole

NURTURING THE SOUL

I felt I needed to pay attention to the effect that the physical surgery and its accompanying treatment had on my mind and emotions – what I define within myself as my inner core, my soul. Medicine alone cannot heal the soul. Medicine can treat the physical site, but the arts can nurture the soul to a state of health and well-being. Cancer has a way of taking away one's sense of control in life. When I work with clay, I reclaim some of that control. My flame rekindles and I nurture it to achieve balance within me, to feel whole again.

Deanne



Creativity can be such great comfort. It is uniquely ours, can never be taken away and can be used anywhere. In times of illness, this source of comfort can become a lifeline.

HEALING THOUGHTS

Initially I saw my drawing as an expression of healing thoughts. Now as I look at it, I see this image also has a goal for me. It identifies a direction that I need to take in order to achieve healing.

I drew this picture of a tear with a glow around it. I wanted to show that sadness and sorrow many times bring a blossoming of growth for ourselves, as well as for those with whom we share tears. The teardrop has taken on a new meaning. Looking at this tear, I am fascinated that I would have drawn it upside down. Now, I think that the tear is turned upside down almost as a prayer. A prayer said in times of need and in times of happiness as well. The golden light around the tear shows the spiritual strength that is received.

I am not sure that this picture reflects my whole experience with cancer, but it does illustrate how this illness has shown me where I need and want to grow the most. The picture says that having cancer is not easy. It shows a growing process of small struggles, spirituality, hope, sharing and love of life. Most importantly, I see a ripple effect. I have come to feel a new self-confidence, strength and clarity in how I see life. With this, I feel an inner calm.

When we are engaged in the process of creating, challenging emotions such as anger, fear and sorrow are put into a more realistic and balanced perspective. These feelings become transformed into a healing energy that allows us to move forward with life.

Cathy



THE ART OF MEDICINE

Although oncologists strive to make healing an exact science, our patients seldom fit within the cubbyholes of “best available evidence.” The art of healing requires that we find a way to build a bridge between scientific knowledge and the highly individual circumstances of each patient. Building this bridge is a creative process for patient and practitioner alike.

In some ways, I am a different person to every patient because I work by the credo, “to cure sometimes, improve often, comfort always.” To comfort always, I must re-create my comforting role for every single patient. The challenge is to build the interpersonal relationship between patient and healer. Each patient lives within a unique environment that includes family and significant others, as well as physical, social and psychological factors. Practitioners also operate in a unique environment, including our own small universe of specialized knowledge.

Few of us would credit the strength needed to heal until we have to face the situation for ourselves. People from every walk of life have this strength. It is not from education or experience or status in life that we rise with such power to deal with the situations we find ourselves in. It is from somewhere within the human spirit that we find the tremendous fortitude needed to heal.

Thirty years ago, a minority of patients were active participants in their own healing. Today, the majority want to have an active role. It is up to us to validate and encourage that role for patients who have this intention.

Arts in Medicine provides another, powerful entryway into healing. Through creativity, patients find a way to come to peace with their situation. This is not fatalism or passivity. It is active, robust peace. It is a peace that everyone can find.

Dr. A.L.A. Fields

Vice President, Medical Affairs and Community Oncology

Alberta Cancer Board

Tile Tales

Telling a visual story on an eight-inch square tile and then expanding on the story through words became known as “Tile Tales.” Unglazed, flat ceramic tiles are poured by local potters or purchased from ceramic studios along with the glazes necessary to create the image and fire the tile.

To begin, we invite participants to sketch their image on a sheet of paper that is the same size as the tile. This template allows them to work with their ideas before beginning to paint the tile. Draft pencil marks, even though they show through some of the softer colours of glazes, actually burn off in the firing.

Colours for ceramic painting can be diluted to create a watercolour effect or mixed together to create unique shades. Special pen nibs allow for fine script for those who want to write their thoughts on the image. Once fired, the tiles emerge from the kiln with a beautiful lustre; the colours are enhanced in the process.

Along with the sketching of the image, there is a story, a poem or a single sentence that comes to mind as the artist works. Together, the image and the words become the artist's Tile Tale.



To Comfort Always, by Elizabeth (Radiation Oncologist)





HEAR THE MUSIC AND DANCE

As a child I used to dream that I could dance. I would leap into the air and float high above the ground. The experience was one of pure joy and lightness of being. As an adult I lost touch with this feeling. Now I look forward to these occasional dreams when the wonderful sense of letting go and the sensation of weightlessness occur. I dream that I can dance, floating, bounding and soaring in a whirl of energy. Let go, listen for the music and dance until you hear it.

Eunice (Health Care Professional)



A NEW BEGINNING

Five years ago, during the first year of my training as an oncologist, I was diagnosed with Hodgkin's Lymphoma. Yes, even oncologists get cancer. I went through chemotherapy and radiation, a rather interesting experience from the other side. Now I am a clinical oncologist, delivering chemotherapy and radiation to patients. I hope my experience has helped my ability to communicate and understand what patients are going through. I am now cured and look back on this experience as a new beginning, a chance to re-evaluate my life. I hope this tile will give people the idea that the diagnosis of a malignancy can be a start, rather than an end.

Sara (Clinical Oncologist)



TO LOVE AND TO HOPE

Cancer can have a negative effect on people's lives, but fortunately it has taught me what's important in life. A call or a visit from friends or family, a smile from a neighbour or a stranger passing by on the street. A walk in the sunset with your animals, the glow of the moon on a bright starlit night, the glimmer of snow from the sun on a crisp winter day, the brilliant colours of a rainbow after a fresh summer rain. Clean water, fresh air, good food and happy, honest people to share these with. Taking time for yourself, to meditate, to laugh, to heal or to play. Ask yourself, "What did I do to make this world a better place to live?" Remember to smile; you can make a difference. To love and to hope.

Doug



HOPE, EMPOWERMENT AND SERENITY

I see myself helping patients move over the bridge from fear, pain and suffering to hope, empowerment and serenity. The river flowing under the bridge represents the river of life. It divides, as my life is divided, between me the individual and me the physician. In the distance are three strong trees representing the strength of the patient, her family and friends, and the team caring for her. On the horizon is the sky with faith, strength and purpose that represents the outside potential to help the individual.

I am an optimist. I believe what I do makes a difference and that we are forever improving the outlook of our patients. My patients make me feel humble each and every day. I am in awe of their strength and purpose. I pray for them. I do my best for them and I care for each and every one of them to the best of my ability.

Katia (Medical Oncologist)



GRANDFATHER CROW

This is an illustration of me as a child in the pink skirt I wore on my first day of school. I am following the guidance of my Grandfather (Crow) in the clouds. His teachings come to me when I need them. Inside Crow's stomach are a fat perch, a rose hip and a thousand dollar bill. These symbols influence my life, helping me value what is important. The ball on the earth beside me depicts the medicine wheel and balancing the emotional, physical, intellectual and spiritual components of my life.

The phases of the moon represent my journey, which includes an appreciation of my own feminine energy that allows it to flourish. My father very much wanted a son. Four daughters were born before my brother; we were treated like sons. The full moon, painted largest, represents my aspiration to live a balanced life and to honour my feminine side.

Jacqueline



THE BEAUTY OF LIFE AROUND US

At first, it is difficult to accept the reality of having cancer. After coming to grips with the initial emotional upheaval, it forces you to re-assess your priorities. Things that used to cause turmoil and stress recede and become minor. The pace we set for ourselves to succeed, to accomplish, to climb to the top, slows down considerably. We weed out the non-issues and come to appreciate again the important values of life, our health, our family and friends. We see the beauty of life around us; "being" rather than "having." The purity and infinite variety of our natural surroundings is the theme of my tile. It is my expression of appreciation.

Marian

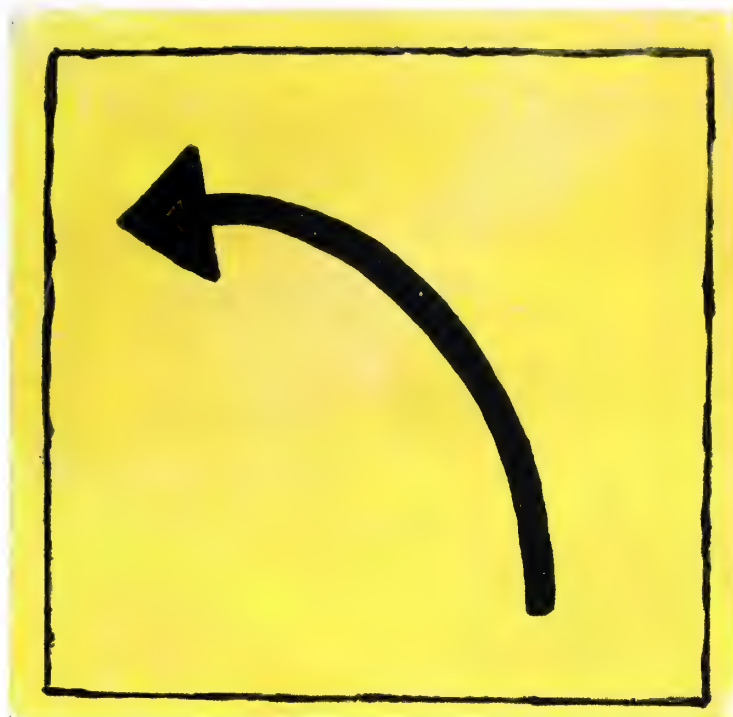


NO BOUNDARIES

Cancer has no favourites, young, old, weak or strong. It has no bias or prejudice. It can lodge in each and every one of us, lurking its ugly head, mostly when we're not expecting it. Cancer has disregard for any sentimental attachments, parents, children, siblings, grandparents, cousins, friends and acquaintances. It has no regard for nationality. It humbles us equally. People are compromised from anger, sometimes to a quiet gentleness. No one can see the scars of the surgeon's stitching, only gentle signs, wigs, thinness, or medications that have caused bloating; sometimes it is the sparkle removed from their eyes.

Coming to the cancer centre, you see faces of worry, concern and fear, then a smile from conversation, a hug for hope and love. All are looking for comradeship, kindness, empathy and sharing of stories. The strong support the weak, people dropping people off, rushing away only to rush back to get them. Others wait patiently for the one they care for; a person alone, with only themselves for support, hoping to find care inside this wonderful building, and that care is you and I.

Mary



ROAD SIGNS

The diagnosis of cancer is like the road signs encountered on a road less traveled. Your life is moving along straight ahead. Suddenly, life throws you a curve: the diagnosis. Everything stops, you begin treatment. The road is bumpy, you have your ups, your downs, the road becomes slippery, and you need firmer ground. You learn to yield to your body, your mind, your spirit. Then it is over; you need to resume speed, to get back into the mainstream of life. You start slow; you proceed with caution. The road is uncertain – where does the road go?

Dianne



SLIPPERY SLOPE

All life is about peaks and valleys. The penguins are such hardy birds and represent the different aspects of cancer. The slippery slope depicts the uncertainty of the cancer journey. Cancer is neither black nor white – there is so much grey and each individual circumstance is unique and different.

Lynne

Creativity is adult play, in disguise.



HOPE

As I thought about my tile, I realized that it spoke to several aspects of my work as a surgeon and medical oncologist. Initially the tile was about government cuts to the health care system and the resulting changes for patients and health care providers alike. At the same time, I was very much aware that this image portrayed the phases a woman may go through as she embarks on chemotherapy. Initially, a woman comes in looking healthy even though she may have physical symptoms. As she begins chemotherapy she may experience the loss of her hair or fatigue or a generalized sense of feeling unwell, like the tired, droopy flowers. Chemotherapy can be physically and emotionally exhausting. But there is hope that following treatment a person's health will spring back.

Alexandra (Medical Oncologist)



STAGES OF LIFE

This flower represents a person. These stages show how a person may be feeling. Nobody lives in only one stage. But the point is that the flower never dies. Through its dreary stages all it needs is a little care. Even after a person's body dies, they are still alive. I think that nobody dies until they are forgotten. Some people don't realize this, but I do.

Krista, age 9

I think that nobody dies until they are forgotten.



BUTTERFLIES ARE FREE

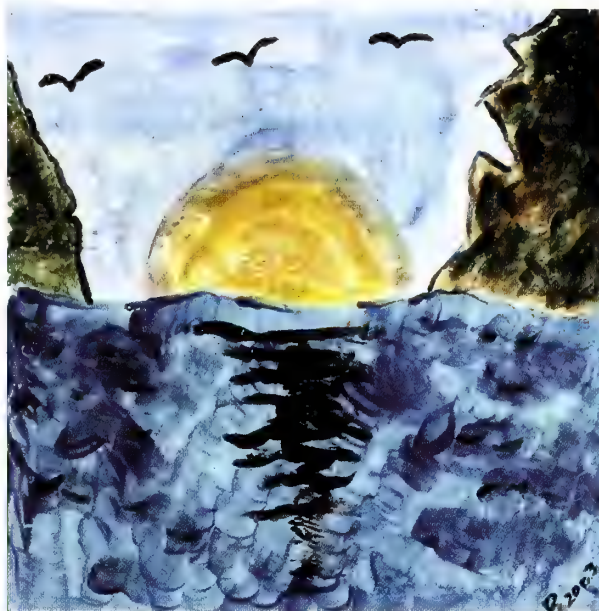
Butterflies are free. They emerge from a dark place and unfold their wings and fly. Their fragile beauty brings light-heartedness to my soul. There is no noise or commotion, just a kiss as they light and float again. When I am burdened with tasks and worries and my heart is heavy, I try to remember butterflies. Like my patients, they come on a whisper, come into my life, touch me gently and leave with a butterfly kiss. But I will not forget the beauty, the gentleness and the joy of feeling their presence and of knowing them. It's a moment in time never forgotten.

May (Health Care Professional)

OVERALL, THE OUTLOOK IS BRIGHT!

My mother and I most often argued about the wash. What nonsense! But I will never forget her; every time I wash, she is there. Her passing steered my life, as I became a nurse and joined the palliative team to provide the care to others that I could not to her. My belief is that I will have another chance, that where we go is the same as where we come from. Life is the patch of green. It is watered by our tears but our trials allow for and promote growth. Thank God for this opportunity.

Hilde



QUIDI VIDI LAKE

Working at a cancer centre has made me appreciate the fragility of life. It could just as likely be me who is ill as the patient sitting across from me. I try to live in the now and not worry about things in the future, especially things I cannot control.

I have come to appreciate the start of each new day. I am thankful for my health and for good friends and family. In the summer, the sunrise on the water at Quidi Vidi Lake gives me a feeling of peace. I appreciate that I am well and can witness such beauty. I think about patients who witness the same sunrise. What do they think about at the beginning of a new day? I am blessed to work with such wonderful, caring people and to be reminded every minute that life is precious.

Brenda



EMERGE

After diagnosis with cancer one is really, for a while, mentally enclosed in a self-built enclave or shell. With treatment, medically or otherwise, plus knowledge and information, slowly one emerges, opens up and can talk of the experience. Hopefully one day to be free but wiser.

Ruth



BUTTERFLY

The butterfly's life represents my mother. In its life cycle from caterpillar to winged beauty, it goes through many changes, hardships and adverse conditions. But it manages always to strive forward on a path of its own. It is, like my mother, beautiful, always bringing a smile of happiness to everyone's face. She is free, though her flight is sometimes affected by difficult situations. She appears light and easy, visiting flowers in the garden, bringing happiness and sunshine to their faces.

Britt



BEHIND THOSE EYES

There is a lot more going on behind a person's eyes than you see. They can express, most of the time, how they feel: sadness, joy, love, anger...but we never see the full emotion. When you look into a person's eyes, don't always assume you know what is going on behind them. The best we can do is to try to understand and react to that emotion accordingly.

Maggie



A VAST PRESENCE

I was diagnosed with breast cancer. After dealing with shock, the fear, the unknown, I decided to see my cancer as a friend – a friend that made me make changes in my life, made me look at my present life. This tile represents the gentle curves, the light, the bright side of my journey, to change my stress by slowing down, to take time for myself, no more rushing here and there. The green areas represent nature, large open fields on these hills where I can relax, breathe and let go. The light has now entered my heart and cancer has brought me beautiful new friends.

Marie-Christine

Do you remember when you were sick, and looking
hard for beauty? When we rode our horses into
that field and we were surrounded by
bright, fleeting monarchs carrying
lifeless (?) ones by the tips
of their dull wings? We were
awed and, at once, frightened by the
enigma of their message.
After you died, I saw them almost every ride,
I saw us flying. I thought I understood.
Then one day I startled...
Imagine me - thinking I was carrying you,





LIFE

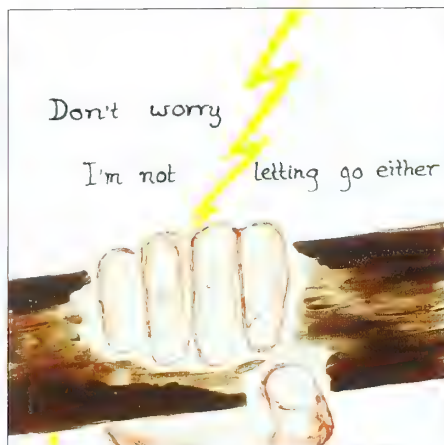
Pathologist
Witness
Seer

Peering into a microscope
A piece of tumor
A piece of body
A piece of life.

Life is represented as a circle consisting of a series of snapshots, each of which appears to demonstrate the entire person. However, the circular person in the snapshot is actually a spiral evolving through time.

The spiral can also represent DNA that winds through life and proteins, unwinding from the spiral and creating the biological whole of the moment.

Judith (Pathologist)



NOT LETTING GO

Patients with cancer teach me the preciousness of each day. One patient, who was also a nurse, helped me teach medical students even when she had advanced disease. She asked them to learn to listen, so patients would not feel alone and would know the doctor cared. She was determined to live each day as much as she could; she spent her last moments watching television with her children.

My first patient was a young woman who had widespread malignant disease. Rather than spend her time in hospital, she chose to spend her last weeks sitting on a beach, laughing with friends, listening to the waves and writing poetry. Both of these courageous women decided to live while they could. They refused to let go. Neither should we. And we can offer something better than chemotherapy or narcotics if we can say "Don't worry, I'm not letting go either."

Grant (Medical Oncologist)



ILLUMINATION

This tile represents the magical moment of illumination and understanding people experience.

John (Radiation Oncologist)



STEALTH

My tile is a stealth liposome – a beautiful way of disguising a toxic drug (red spikes) to make it less toxic. The drug is trapped inside a lipid membrane (yellow and gold), which carries it to a tumour. The stealth coating (blue) makes the liposome look like water and prevents the destruction of the liposome, letting it carry the drug to the tumour.

Theresa (Professor of Pharmacology)

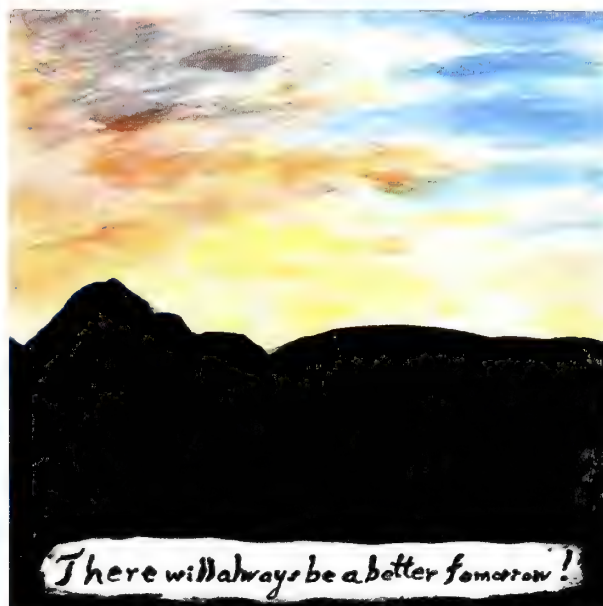
As we create, we re-create ourselves.
The very cells of our body hear the
message...they are compelled to follow...
to re-create and heal themselves.



GOING, GOING, GONE

This tile represents the treatment of and triumph over a brain tumour using surgery, radiation and chemotherapy towards a complete cure. The shades of grey and blue in the background show the transition from the darkness of night (the tumour) to the lightness of day (the cure). The darkness is the time that patients and families are involved in the medical system, and the lightness is their release from the medical world.

Keith (Pediatric Neurosurgeon)



THERE WILL ALWAYS BE A BETTER TOMORROW!

As a cancer surgeon, I have learned from my patients that physicians can always improve the quality of life if they quickly develop a good rapport with their patients. There have been substantial advances in the management of cancer in all stages of the disease. When I started my practice, Wilm's tumours were curable in only twenty percent of children, but now eighty percent are cured. Young men with testicular cancer that had spread to the lungs had a life expectancy of fifteen months, but now over eighty percent are curable. We have also made great strides in the management of pain and other problems related to the treatment of the disease.

Malcolm (Oncology Surgeon)



A NEW DAY

The tile has been damaged intentionally. Cancer is shattered lives, broken dreams, conquering fears and hope. The tile symbolizes putting bodies, minds and loved ones back together. The sunrise of a new day brings renewed hope and rebirth of the indomitable human spirit shining through the darkness.

Brad (Radiation Oncology Resident)



Tile by Florence



It's
journey
of the
when you
you'll be
ung on!!

a long
to the top
hill but
reach the top
glad you



CATCHING FROGS

This is me lying in bed in the hospital. Being in the hospital for treatment is very boring. I'm imagining what I could do when I feel better. I'd like to go outside and catch frogs.

Katie, age 10



The message that I'm trying to tell you is to never give up on your dreams just like I am never giving in to cancer

MY GREAT ADVENTURE – A TRUE STORY

My great adventure starts in Edmonton on a breezy September day. When I was nine years of age I witnessed the worst thing in my entire life. I witnessed cancer in my leg. My dad found it when we were playing around.

So the first day of school I missed because I had to go to a doctor's appointment with my mom. A normal x-ray could not spot the cancer in my leg but a couple weeks later I had my first MRI. That's how we figured out that I had cancer.

About two months later I had a biopsy right above my knee. I had to be put to sleep because if I were awake it would hurt very badly. A biopsy takes a very long time to do because it is very hard to take just a small piece of bone.

Then a few weeks later I had chemotherapy. Chemotherapy helped to kill the cancer that was in my knee. But when it was time for surgery I was very scared just like my mom was on that very same day. My mom was scared because she was worried about me.

I am finally finished my chemotherapy today. The message that I'm trying to tell you is to never give up on your dreams just like I am never giving in to cancer.

Meaghan, age 10



TILE TALES

(an expressive art project)

THE TALE

Name: Karma

Tile #: _____

Title of your tile:

Angel on ~~your~~ ^{Your} Shoulder

Tell/write about your tile:

When you walk into the doors of the
 Cross Cancer Institution really fast an angel
 will appear on your shoulder but once you
 cancer is gone you know that the angels
 have been helping you by saving you
 by helping drag you up to keep you breathing
 And trying to keep you standing. So when
 you walk in those doors don't think you alone,
 you will have a guardian angel on your
 shoulder.



Story and Tile by Karma, age 11



FROM LIFE, TO TILE

To describe the feelings that people go through after finding out they have a life-threatening illness is very hard, but I found it a bit easier to draw those feelings. On my tile I tried to make it so that other people can relate to what it's like to go through such a thing. The first thing I did was to think of what my life was like before I knew that I was sick, then I drew it. It was a beautiful place, bright, fun and happy – somewhat of a perfect world.

Then came the hard part, going back to the time when I heard that word (CANCER). It scared the @!#& out of me, thinking that this is really happening to me. When it came time to draw those feelings the first thing that came to me was total destruction. And that's where the idea of a tornado ripping through this perfect world of mine came from, and that's what it was really like for me. Cancer will always have a very big effect on our lives, no matter where the twister lands. If we have the right attitudes and a caring family we can get through anything. That's how I did it.

Matthew, age 17

MUSIC BOXES

One morning, I was feeling particularly vulnerable, sad and teary. My young daughter appeared on the scene and came over to me with a music box. She carefully set it down and then disappeared into her room bringing back another music box and another and another, until there were six music boxes surrounding me. Each music box played its own unique tune, but the sounds mingled into a harmonious oneness. My tears subsided in this moment as my child shared her love and care in the way only a child can.

Lorna



PRIMAL LOVE

First, I heard the sound of our hearts breaking. It was loud, cruel and razor sharp – a high-pitched painful sound with cold wind whistling through crevices and across jagged peaks.

But cancer has taught me to be still and to listen carefully for the new sounds of healing, to recognize my first love for Hallie as she grew beneath my heart, to never doubt my instincts and to never doubt hers. In the beginning, I couldn't imagine undertaking this tile. It seemed a creation too personal and impossible to express. But the "epiphany" came to me in the quiet hours of early morning, and as I have with cancer, I have learned to trust, be brave and step into the experience.

Jane



If I could
I would take
You
back inside
MY
body...

I would
make
You
well
and
whole...
MOM



MY HOUSE

I love my little yellow house, but I have not spent much time there. When my parents were anxiously awaiting my arrival my daddy was diagnosed with cancer. We spent lots of time away from home during and after my arrival while he received treatment. Now that he is feeling better we have spent many happy days in our house. When I was eighteen months old my mommy became sick with cancer also. Again I have been away from my little yellow house. I hope my mommy will soon be better and we can all go home to my little yellow house.

Mattison, age 2 (with the assistance of her grandmother)



TWINKLE TWINKLE

Before you were born, we painted you a sky so you could lie in your crib and dream beyond the walls around you. When you were small, we would take you out on a warm summer's night to gaze up at the stars and feel the world around you. "Are there more stars out tonight Mom and Dad?" The sparkle in your eyes was reflecting the sky. "Yes, Mattison, I think there are!"

Katrina and Glen (parents of Mattison)



CANCER IS MEAN

This is just what I feel – cancer is mean. My sister Krystie died of a brain tumour when she was five. I was about eleven. My favourite thing to do with her was cook – on her Easy Bake oven. Her favourite was the ginger cookies – that's what we made most often. I really miss the way she used to screech when we made her mad, like Screechie on Care Bears, you know.

Matthew, age 13



FLOWERS IN A VASE

I had leukemia when I was four, I think. When you have cancer you need something nice to think about instead – I like to think about flowers. They make me smile.

Brooke, age 7



HOW I FEEL ABOUT CANCER

This tile represents how much love you get when you have cancer, the good and the bad sides of cancer, and how much peace and quiet you get to think. I like to think about flowers.

Janelle, age 10

When you have cancer
you need something nice to
think about instead – I like
to think about flowers.



CANCER ISN'T FUN CUZ IT HURTS!

I had cancer when I was four until I was seven. Now I'm nine. It's not fun to have cancer. I didn't like the operations. They made me really sleepy and I hurt when I woke up. After one operation I had to have a hole in my neck, and I had to cover the hole if I wanted to talk.

When I had cancer I didn't have any hair, and I hated the medicines I had to have – they didn't taste good at all. Now my cancer is gone. Now that I'm better I get to wake up to sunshine and play a lot!

Rachel, age 9

Missing my friends is the hardest part about having cancer !!



MISSING MY FRIENDS

I have cancer. It's hard having cancer. It's not easy at all. I had to have surgery on my brain, and then radiation, and now chemotherapy. The hardest thing for me about having cancer is missing my friends! My friends love me! Chelsey, Kathy and Kelsey are really good friends. They play with me. They talk to me. They come to visit me. And they don't tease me about my hair falling out. They don't laugh at me. I wish I could play with them more. I wish I could have a pizza party for all my friends! On my tile, I am the one in the middle with no hair and my friends are all around me. Even though they have hair, they are wearing hats just like me, to help me feel better.

Katie, age 7



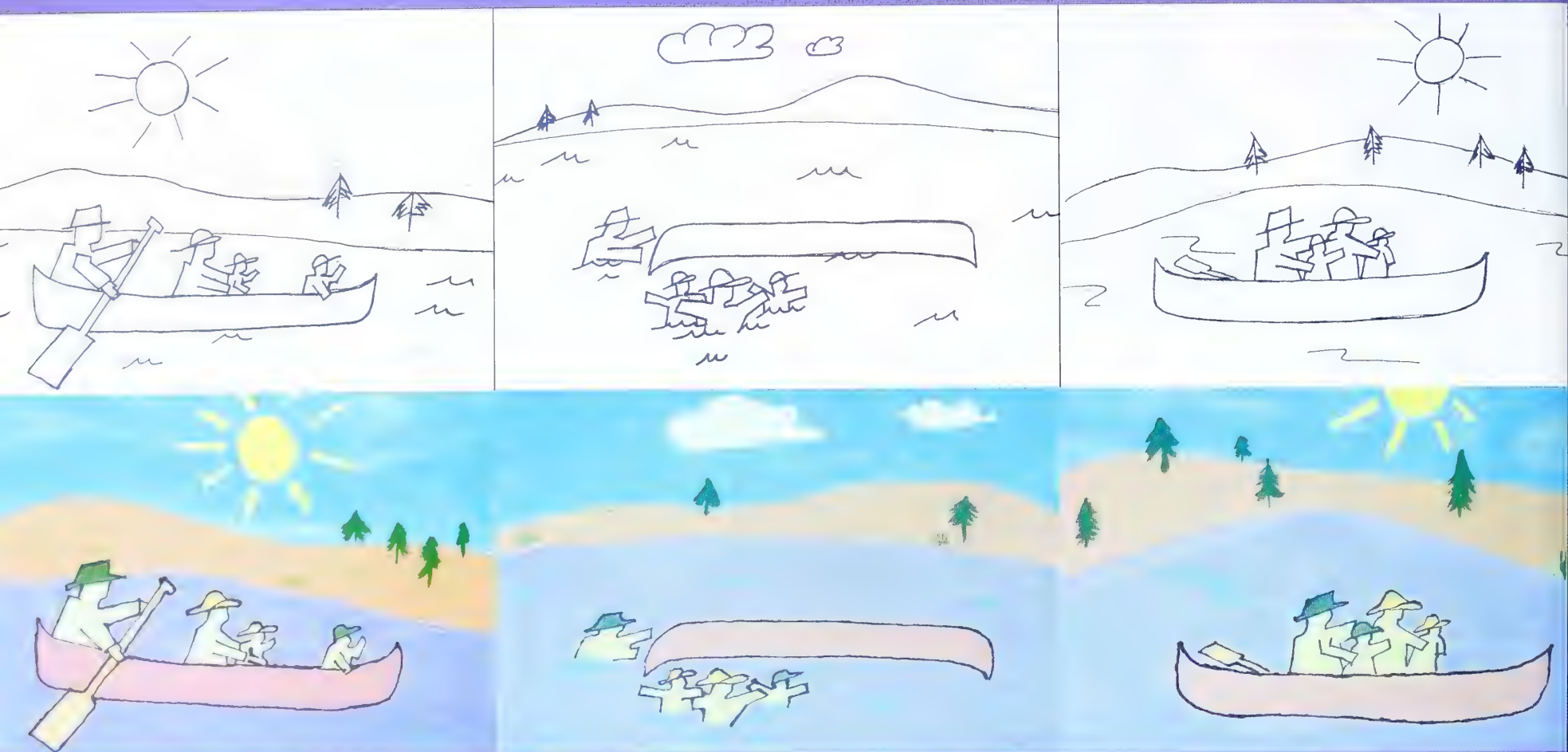
HAPPINESS WILL COME

My tile represents the emotions I feel knowing that my brother has cancer. At first, I was devastated. The usual questions: How could this happen to us? What will happen now? I cannot answer these questions but I do know that happiness will come. You see, at the top of my tile, there are clouds, symbolizing the pain my brother and our family are going through, and the raindrops falling to earth symbolize my tears and longing to have my old brother back.

Each raindrop is a different colour because each tear has a different meaning. Although all these horrible things have happened, I know it will get better and that is why the clouds are parting to produce a shining sun. The raindrops create brilliant flowers on the ground, each flower having one of the colours of one of the raindrops because each tear will help me get through this and in the end produce a happy future.

Anonymous, age 15

Each raindrop is a different colour because each tear has a different meaning.



THE CANOE TRIP

The canoe trip started out very smoothly. Then without warning, our canoe capsized. Our first instinct was the safety of the children. We were able to quickly get the children into a canoe that was following us, and managed to get everyone back to shore safely. This experience left our son very fearful of the canoe. We decided that the best way to deal with this was to get right back in the canoe and continue to our original destination downstream. We convinced him to face his fear by assuring him that we would be right beside him. We explained to him that the only way to face his fear was to get back in the canoe.

After this experience, I realized that my situation was similar to my son's experience. My own words to help him face his fear and get back in the canoe could also be applied to me as I faced a new round of chemotherapy with the recurrence of my cancer. I am now back in the canoe – with the support of my family and friends.

Melissa



My own words to help him face his fear and get back in the canoe could also be applied to me as I faced a new round of chemotherapy with the recurrence of my cancer.



LABYRINTH

Cancer is like a maze: there are many paths but only one destination. When someone is first diagnosed with cancer there are many treatments they can go through. In a way these different treatments are like paths through which there are many turns and everyone takes their own turns and paths. Although everyone has their own way to get through the maze, there is only one destination everyone strives for – a cure.

Laura, age 16

CHANGE CHANGE CHANGE

The different colour (yellow) on my hand represents how I've been changed because of cancer in my life. I've changed physically, emotionally, spiritually and mentally. But even though I've had cancer, I am still me. I used bright colours because cancer in my life wasn't necessarily a bad thing, and I put the colour on my palm because that is more central than a fingertip, and cancer is an important but not really excellent part of my life. Cancer for me wasn't a very terrible, bad thing, but it was a very scary time of my life. I wouldn't give it up for anything (if you can understand that, I don't know). Cancer changed my life very dramatically.

Nicole, age 16



LADYBUG, LADYBUG

Ladybugs defy what my dad calls "The Laws of Physics." They fly even though it's supposedly not possible. People with cancer are like ladybugs, because many of them defy the sometimes seemingly impossible odds, allowing their mind, body and spirit to fly free. They do this no matter how many obstacles cancer may put in their way.

Allison, age 14





IN GOD'S HAND

I could not imagine going through this ordeal alone;
I surrendered myself into God's Hand.

I started to read books, listen to music, hear uplifting words,
meditate, and I learned.

I started to believe that everyone who prayed for me and sent me
an abundance of positive energy was definitely part of my recovery.

I started to believe that we are all ONE in the Universe,
God being Us and Us being God.

I started to believe that each of us is a god or goddess in embryo
and that we therefore have to take responsibility by making the best
choices we can every minute of our lives.

I started to be conscious of my choices.

I started to believe that we have to use our power of thinking as
a tool to live our lives to their fullest.

I started to take responsibility when times were difficult and
learned to say: "It's only a thought and a thought can be changed."

I started to believe that the more we give the more we receive
and that for every inch of forgiveness we get a mile of peace.

I started to believe and I started to heal.

Christiane



HUNG OUT TO DRY

When did it happen? The sky was so clear and blue. I was so busy
making "figure 8s" on the ice. The words "you have breast cancer"
stopped me in my tracks and I hung up my skates, along with my
hair. The clothespins held me up through the fear and sheer terror of
the diagnosis. I learned big words like "chemotherapy" and saw the
word "mother" shine through the syllables. And just like my mother
used to do on sunny or icy days, she took me and the clothes off the
line and I was safe and protected, in spite of the wintry experience of
cancer. Art reminds me of the love of my mother.

Andie





HEALING

When you find out that you have cancer, you feel like your world is broken in two. Tears flow like raindrops from heaven. Once the initial shock is over, the healing begins. Chemotherapy and radiation heal your body but the friends and family, the nurses and health care workers surround you to help heal your heart and spirit. They form a circle of love. Your Guardian Angel is always there to watch over and protect you, even in your darkest hours. This special angel will guide you through your treatments and continue to be there when your healing is complete. Then you shall find the sun will shine again for you.

Cathy (Health Care Professional)



HOPE

In treating children with cancer and dealing with their families I believe that we must be realistic and honest but we must also encourage hope and express this in ourselves as health care professionals. The clouds with lightning show how I imagine the patient and family feel when they first meet us and hear the diagnosis, when we talk to them about the surgery. Then, the next level of clouds represents the beginning of recovery. Eventually, beyond the clouds, they can see the hope, the rainbow and the sun.

John (Orthopedic Surgeon)



THE SMALL AND MIGHTY

Since I began working with children who have cancer, my life has changed. Their strength and courage are amazing. They are able to endure the toughest times without dampening their spirit. It is these children who remain strong through all of the things that the world throws at them.

Countless times it is the children who say, "Cheer up Mom. It will be okay." It is the child who has lost the limb that says, "I don't know why Dad is still so upset," as they walk down the hallway on crutches while their parents watch with tears in their eyes.

These children carry the hopes and dreams of their parents and families on their shoulders. Their laughter and smiles carry us to a happier place. If only we had the strength and courage of these small and mighty children.

Scott (Health Care Professional)

*Hope is one of the
best medicines for my spirit.*



DIAGNOSIS

This is an image that my youngest daughter drew shortly after being diagnosed with leukemia at age five. It has always been one of my favourite drawings of hers but I was never quite sure what the clouds, heart and rain meant. Now four years later I've revisited her image and think that the "protected" heart represents my daughter and the "crying" clouds on either side are my husband and I. Even in the midst of the initial tears and seemingly dark clouds at her diagnosis there was a feeling of love, protection and hope that shone through. We are now two years out of treatment and my daughter is a happy, healthy ten-year-old girl. The words beauty, truth, love, courage and hope are all aspects of our journey together as a family. The circles inside the heart represent both of my daughters.

Alexis



LET GO, LET GOD

In the early stages of my child's diagnosis and treatment, I remember intense periods of overwhelming fear and impending darkness and the urge to curl up, hide and shield ourselves from this obscure invader called cancer. However, over time we began to surrender to whatever complication or gift that would arise and embrace ourselves and others, as if floating through the process. I am still striving.

Diane



FACING CANCER

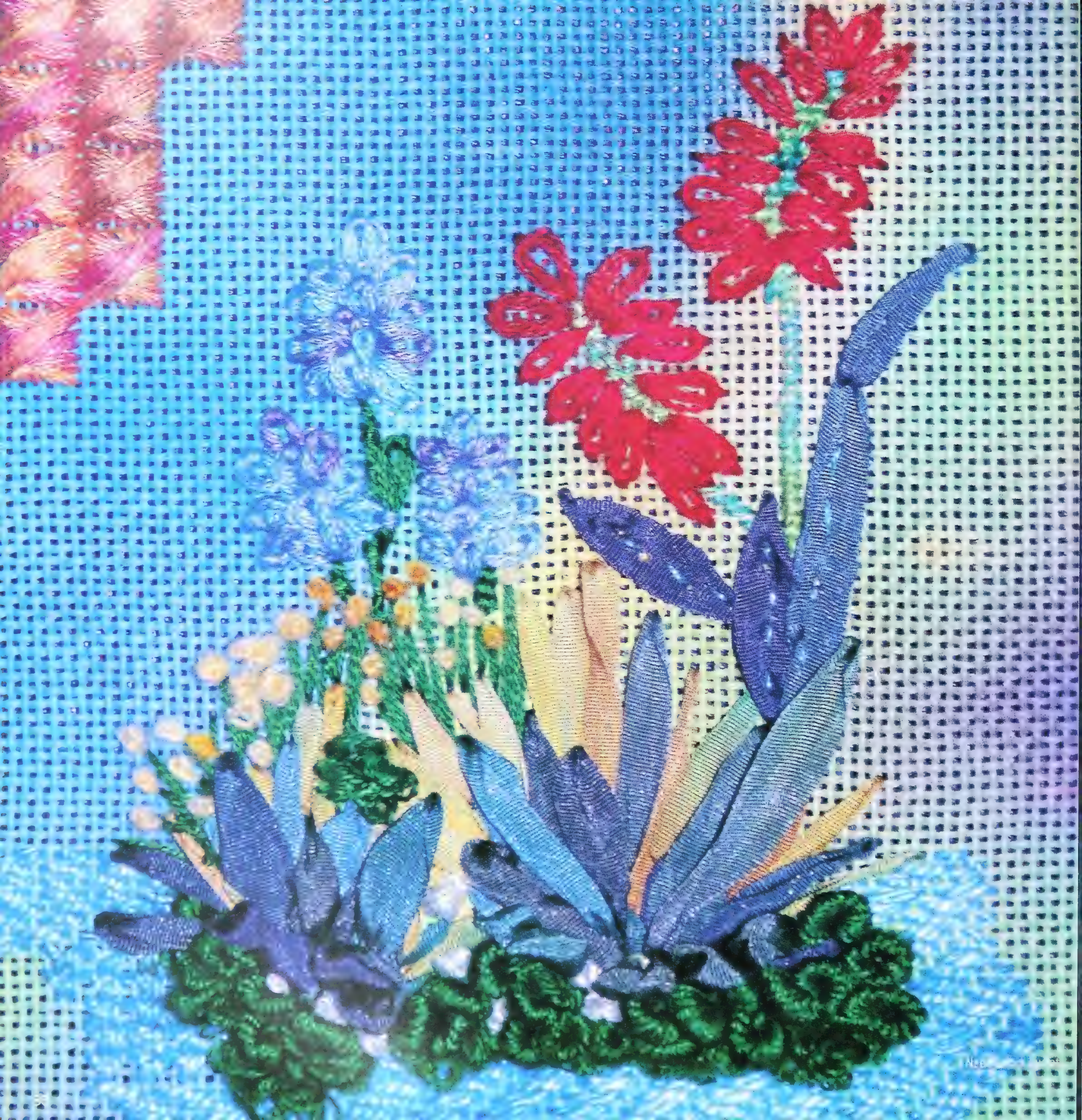
I feel facing cancer is always easier knowing you're going through it the whole time with the best friend you have. That's the person deep within you.

I feel it's about suffering through the eyes of children – my own. They both seem to face the illness of cancer through a new bond of friendship. They seem to have found in the strength of friendship between them, a genuine wisdom and sense of self.

Sharon

Tiles clockwise
from top left
Shizuka
Shirley
Paris
Tammie
Michelle
Dianne
Maria
Joanne
Vivienne
Natalie
Jo-Ann
Anne
Elizabeth





THE NEEDLE

*The needle, such a simple tool that tugs upon a thread.
It weaves the beauty of life's colours into the canvas bed.
With thread and needle ready, the choice was, "Where do I begin?"
The canvas insisted softly, "The border! Fence creativity in."
So I started in the upper left as I was always taught.
A good wide border on this project, total control was my thought.
I stitched the first few stitches and they cried out to be free.
Borders keep me in control!
Not them, as you can plainly see.
I've always been quite good at borders dividing up my time.
Little boxes in a row, decisions on a dime.
Six well-defined spaces to my mind clearly come.
My mom, three children, and a spouse and all the jobs I've done.
It's time to give up borders and let my soul fly free.
Accept whatever life presents and creatively be me.*

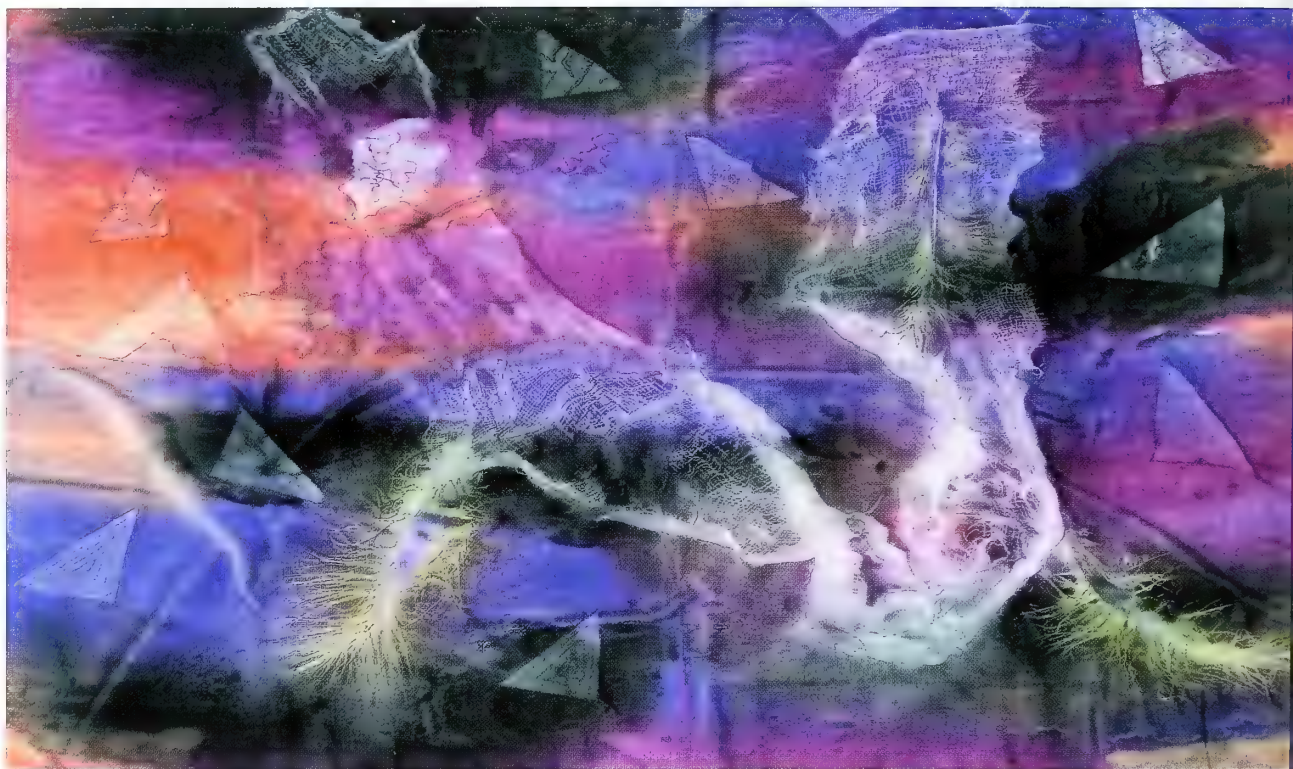
Pat Batten

Arts in Medicine participant

Fibre & Beading Arts

The materials we use in fibre arts are as familiar as the clothing we wear; the techniques, often as familiar as our grandmothers. The opportunity to pick up a needle and thread takes us back to a place where things happen one stitch at a time. The return to traditional arts of decorative stitching, appliqué, weaving and stringing beads often brings with it memories of childhood experiences of learning skills that require patience and focus.

The long tradition of fibre arts also includes working together to complete individual projects or to contribute individual pieces for a group project. Stitching together and carrying out a conversation about everything from the most ordinary of everyday events to the most heartfelt joys and sorrows, makes these art forms ideal for Arts in Medicine. The journaling component invites participants to reflect on their experience and gain understanding of their own healing journey.



SILENCE

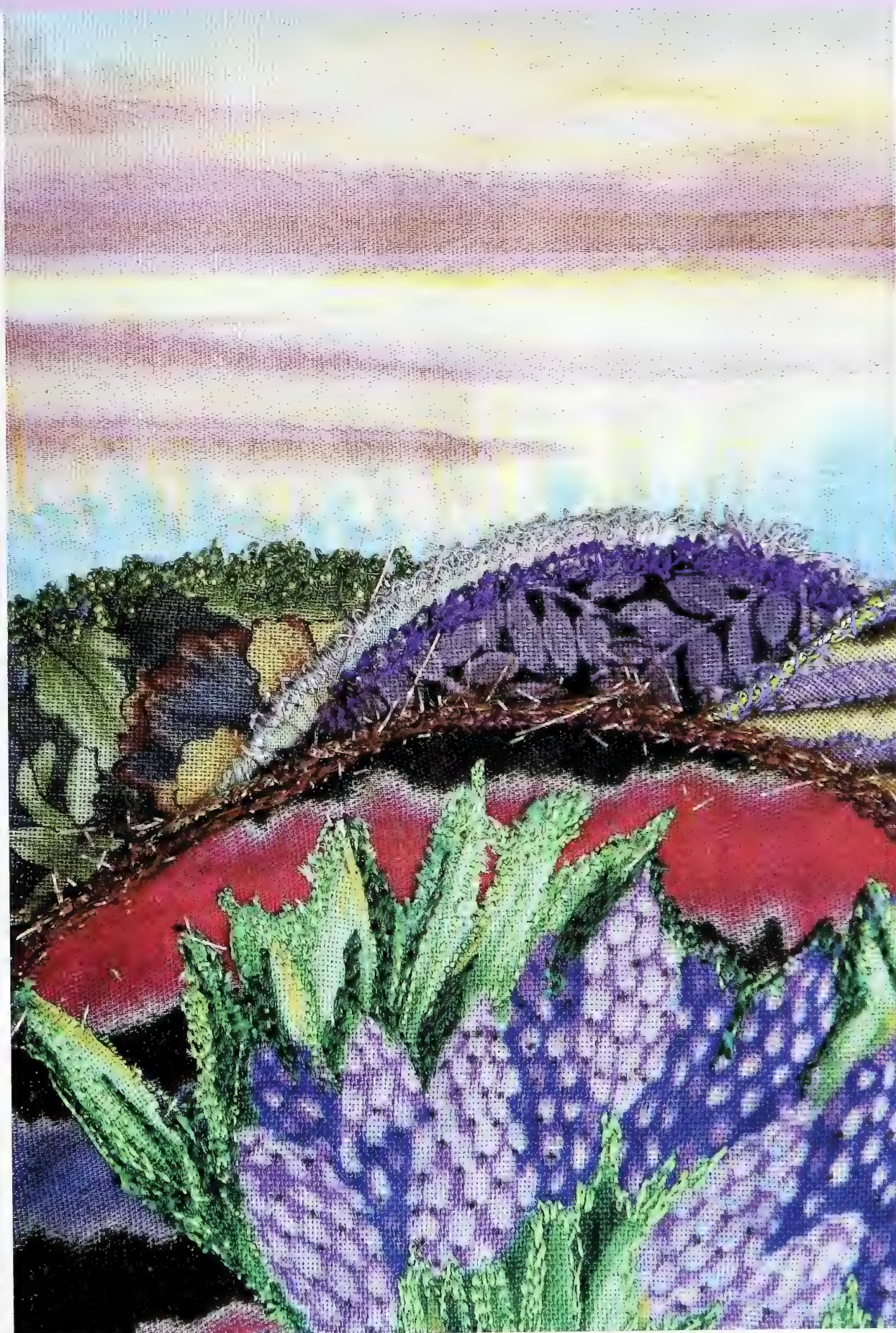
On the morning of the last day of a quilting workshop in the Rocky Mountains, I discovered a lump in my left breast. It was pure shock, mixed with disbelief and fear. My intuition told me not to worry, that the necessary measures would be taken upon my return home. Another part of me said, just relax and enjoy the day, the lump is probably nothing more than a cyst.

I was having a great time in a fabric painting workshop, surrounded by beautifully creative and energetic people. But my mind could not stop thinking...what if...what if...what if? Almost involuntarily, I began to create a piece that reflected my wondering and wandering thoughts. I have since called the piece "Silence."

This fabric art represents a floating woman, on the grey side of the painted fabric, a woman who is uncertain of where she wishes to go. She has no boundaries and yet does not wish to stay where she is. Her mind creates a silhouette face in the distance, representing a child in distress floating in the universe and going towards a lighter orange space.

I was the floating woman, scared of what I had discovered. I felt terribly lonely. I felt invaded by something unwanted, having no say over what might be happening to me. I wanted to move quickly to this orange light, thinking that I would feel better. I was probably wrong. Yet my intuition kept reassuring me, telling me to enjoy the present, because the future is unknown. These thoughts and feelings were the beginning of a journey for me, through an unknown galaxy called cancer.

Marie-Christine



DOODLING WITH THREAD

I am thankful that I have had this opportunity and the materials to discover within myself the simple pleasure of doodling with thread. The image of my flower island was clearly painted in the canvas, begging to be stitched. It represents the peace I find in my family, and the support and independence of our island in a sea of life's uncertainty. And the border – it may yet disappear completely from this piece, or I may decide to finish it in the lower right-hand corner to form a bracket around this time in my life.

Pat



Needlework by Zelma

THE PROCESS IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE FINAL PRODUCT

The condition of my soul. I close my eyes, trying hard to concentrate on images to promote internal peace and tranquility and expecting to find only chastising thoughts of who will be disappointed with me for wasting time or trying to do something that I am obviously incapable of learning to do. And yet, for a moment an image came to my mind.

A place, a quiet place, where there were no deadlines, no earth-shattering expectations, no trying to fit in, and no voices but my own. My voice said rest, it is okay to be tired. It said cry, it is okay to be sad for the difficult changes in my life. To laugh when things don't turn out exactly as I had planned. To feel for others around me and be thankful for this moment of quiet and friendship in the room. Turn off the world for a short time, for it will be there as soon as you open your eyes. Just for a time, breathe without the weight of my responsibilities. Smile and express feelings that are mine. Play, not for a specific purpose, but just to experience play.

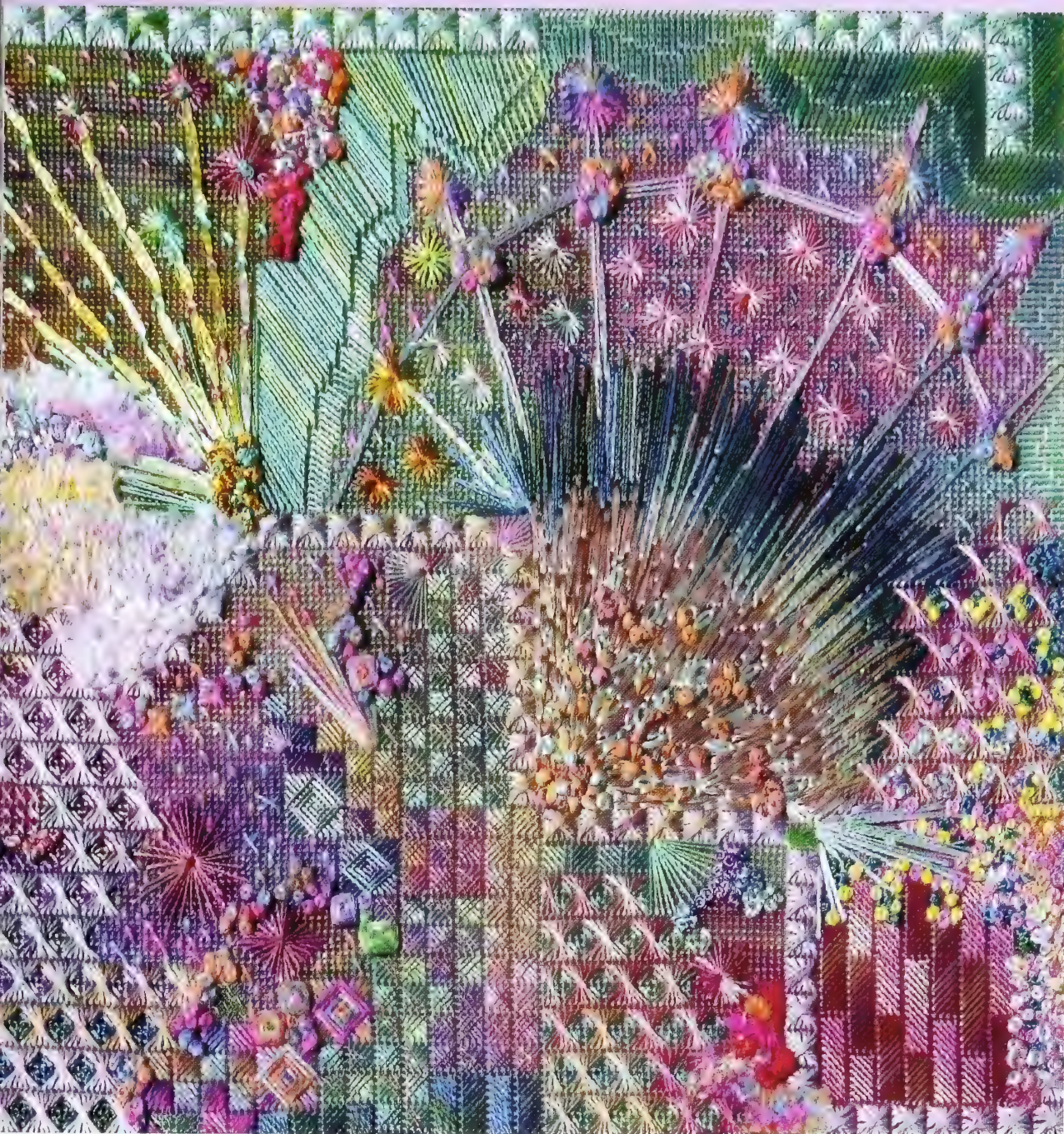
Colour
represents the
spirit of life,
and I bask
in its beauty
and diversity.



Needlework by Lorraine

If life is the process, then play must surely be the building blocks that are coloured by emotions, shaped by intuition, forged in the heat of effort and hard work, weathered by the forces of daily demands, and stacked, one by one by one, by a person's resolve to reach and experience all that is worthwhile in the journey. Is the process of living to make the best you can of every day as important as the final product? I believe it is. For when I ask myself, "What is the final product?" my answer is: The blessing of a contented soul.

Pat



Story and Needlework by Debbie



Needlework by Donna

PILOT LIGHT

I think we are all born with a light shining within us, a sort of pilot light. When we are doing things that make us feel alive and well and happy, that pilot light increases in size. Even when we leave our familiar path for places where we do not feel particularly vibrant or alive, our pilot light never goes out. It is always there just waiting to burn brighter.

I just want to hear the rhythm of the thread.

Wool Painting

Creativity
sometimes
allows our
own best kept
secrets to
sneak out...
often to our
surprise,
and we can
stand back
and look with
appreciation
at them and
at ourselves.



MEMORIES OF MY HOME STATE: NORTH CAROLINA

My wife and I returned to North Carolina after ten years, to visit my cousins. I found that I had mixed emotions. After my cancer surgery and radiation treatments, how would they accept me? Would things be the same or somehow different after so many years of not seeing them? My work on the North Carolina wool painting helped me centre myself and focus on family and love and a family's ability to accept all things.

In the upper left-hand corner is a free-style interpretation of North Carolina Dogwood blossoms, which bloom each year at Easter. The lower right-hand corner depicts a sailboat and the Atlantic Ocean. I spent many happy summers with my cousins at the family's beach cottage. I remember the sandy beaches, long walks in the early morning, swimming and collecting seashells, which washed up on the beach every minute of the day. And in the air was the daily serenade of the seagulls.

As if by magic, the Atlantic Ocean's waves create a friendly, comfortable, haunting rhythmic flow, which you heard first thing in the morning and then last thing, a lullaby which assisted you in falling asleep. The waves could be ever so soothing and, within a heartbeat, be rough and dark and foreboding as a summer storm filled with the chill of rain that was quickly approaching. The wonder of God the Creator and the lessons that one learns from nature.

Deep within the soul is a need to be brought together after the trauma of a life-and-death experience such as cancer surgery and the months and months of radiation therapy, physiotherapy, and plain old recovery and healing. There is a desire to become a whole human being once again, complete with its wonder, loves and fears.

James

WOOL PAINTING

The process of working with beautiful colours and soft fabrics makes me happy. I feel light and airy. I lose myself in the hooking of the wool. I forget my troubles and worries for a while. What colour will I choose? Some are bright, some are dull; some smooth and some with bumps. That's how my life is, dealing with cancer. Yet all the colours run together in the end.

Helen



FIELD OF DREAMS

My field of dreams makes me feel safe. If I feel the need to take a break and be peaceful, I go to this place. All of the colours symbolize my many different emotions. This field is my road to Heaven and to peace. I welcome everyone to enjoy my field of dreams, to feel peace and to have hope.

Nibal

ENJOYING LIFE AGAIN

My wool painting depicts a journey from dark to light. It's like the journey with cancer. It's so dark at the beginning and it is such a struggle to journey to the light. When I started in this class, I was living in the dark, in deep depression. Through Arts in Medicine, I have made the journey from dark to light, from death to living again, from depression to enjoying life again.

Linda



As the critic rested, the creative, intuitive part of me awakened. As I worked with my hands, an inner rhythm was generated.



REFLECTIONS ON SILK FUSION

The four layers of silk that I used to create this piece have prompted me to reflect upon the layers of life as I go through chemotherapy and radiation therapy for breast cancer. First, there is the physical layer with its enormous fatigue, nausea and loss of appetite that accompanied chemo.

Then there is the psychological layer, the need to constantly “psyche” myself up to remain positive in my thinking, to accept the loss (hopefully temporary) of the meaning and joy that have accompanied my ministry, to nourish a spirit of hope and courage, to learn to live one day, one hour and on occasion, during chemo, one breath at a time. The emotional layer is more like a roller coaster than a layer. My emotions were, and still are at times, like waves tossed in the wind in a storm. On this emotional layer is the grief of many losses: health, hair, ministry, sense of who I am, loss of desire and passion for life. So many losses.

The spiritual layer calls me to examine anew the God Mystery in my life: who I am and who God is for me at this time in my life. I reflect upon all my relationships. I feel the need to hang on to HOPE, to God who is my hope and, at the same time, to let go of everything that can keep me from being open and transformed by the mystery of God in my life.

What I also notice is that I did not do a fifth layer of silk in my project and it reminds me that I have not paid enough attention to the social layer in my life. I can only hope that something new and beautiful will emerge from the darkness of the cocoon in which all these layers seem to be disintegrating only to be transformed and interwoven into something new and beautiful.

Doreen



Silk Collage by Marnie

FINE STRANDS

In my attempt to subdue and shape thin webs of silk, I drew a parallel with life. Yes, life, with all of its struggles. The design in one's mind at the outset is often quite different from the end product. It is strange how the fine silk threads adhere to one's hands. At first these tenuous strands reminded me of our fragile life and how we endeavour to control and cling to it. But, are we really clinging to life, or is life clinging to a body that tries to free itself?

Is one's mind caught in a mysterious web of its own, just as our fingers become tangled in our silks? What a colourful experience.

Working with the fine strands taught me that although life is chaotic at times, I could try to view it as more whimsical than frenzied. I let beads and pieces of candy wrapper simply fall on my silk while I hummed a rather polyrhythmic song. It showed me that even though we don't know how the scattered pieces of our life will turn out, we can hold on to the fact that it will turn out to be a thing of beauty. It is all in how we perceive it.

Jeanne



Butterfly by Jeanne

MY BUTTERFLY

My butterfly has emerged from its cocoon. I had not planned on making a butterfly but the silk I laid on my screen, side by side, suddenly took on a mind of its own. Two wings suggested themselves...and strands, and silks, and colours, and beads, and there was a butterfly!

So much of our lives are like this butterfly – accidents, illnesses, happy and unhappy circumstances, and there is the opportunity to explore, to discover, to create, to rebuild and to go on. Butterflies are fragile and have a short life span, unless we choose the Monarch butterfly, which can travel thousands of miles. And butterflies are colourful. They flit from flower to flower. Let us all be butterflies – Monarchs!

Jeanne

I am remembering that I still have a child within just waiting to engage in even the simplest moments of creativity.

Story Block Quilt



The Story Block Quilt was almost two years in the making. It has been described as a blanket of wisdom, made up of eighty squares contributed by patients, family members and health care staff. Each uniquely designed square tells a story.

Each person was given two pieces of the same fabric to incorporate with the other fabrics they selected. This provided a unifying thread that traveled through the squares, connecting them one to the other.

These stories were sewn into a piece that speaks of the human condition, an appreciation of the preciousness of life and an understanding that articulates not only the fragility of life, but the resiliency and inspiration that reside within the human spirit.

The stories and the imagination expressed in each square reflect how each of us is "one of a kind." While we have our commonalities, each one of us is furnished with our own distinct and irreplaceable qualities as human beings.



GROWING TOGETHER

The group is all in this together. Each person is separate and individual, yet we are together. Ironical that something so intrinsically destructive as cancer can bring us alongside each other in such a positive and health-giving way! That little portion of hope and of strength that each of us has, thrown together for a brief period of time like adding logs to a small, insignificant fire until it is blazing brightly, emitting heat and light to the larger world of our friends, our families and to the rest of our universe who are thus helped as well. Women have so much to offer, so much courage, creativity, sensitivity and love. The fire grows stronger log after log, building until the light and heat produce growth. But growth also needs rain, and it is the rain that brought us all into each other's lives in the first place. The background is different now, more subdued. The logs lean inward, one supporting the other. The flame reaches upward and outward and the tree of life grows.

Anne (Physiatrist)

*Ironical that something
as intrinsically destructive
as cancer can bring us
alongside each other
in such a positive
and health-giving way!*



COLLAGE

I am writing this one year to the date that I was diagnosed with cancer. The months to follow proved to be hard, with surgery then chemotherapy. The quilt square is a collage of the things that helped my wife and me get through this difficult time.

- The house depicts my sanctuary during this sad and scary time.
- The driveway leads to the future.
- The two hearts as windows on the house are Darlene and I.
- The clouds are to shade the sadness.
- The sun denotes brighter days ahead.
- The snails are for the slower pace of life I vowed to keep.
- Evergreen trees are to be ever clear of cancer.
- The rocks are for my stubbornness towards the cancer.
- The white flowers are for purity.
- The birds are for the ones I feed and watch for comfort.
- The butterfly is for freedom.
- The cats are made from their actual hair; they were very sensitive to my illness and were a constant comfort.
- Eleven trees are for the eleven months I've endured, the circles for trees denote the circle of life.
- Two sunflowers are Darlene and I – and are our favourite.
- The horseshoe is a symbol of good luck.
- Framed in twine for my love of the country life.

I truly hope this helps someone.

Randy



STRENGTH AND COURAGE

A friend sent me a card that read, "It takes STRENGTH to be courageous and COURAGE to be strong." As I reflect on the past year, I realize that I did have both strength and courage. Throughout this experience I was never alone. I had tremendous love, support and lots of prayers from my family and friends. I now want to believe that the treatments were successful, and dispel any thoughts of the cancer returning. I am moving forward and putting this experience with cancer behind me. My quilt square depicts my belief in time (the hourglass), peace (the dove) and that peace comes from within (the heart).

Joyce

GIFTS

The story of my square is that cancer, though heartbreaking and devastating, can also bestow gifts – gifts of quality of time if not length, and healing of spirit if not body.

Laura



OPTIONS

As I work with the fabric I notice that because I don't have enough material, I have to look at my options. Like life with cancer, one has to look at many options and try to achieve the best design that life provides with beauty and joy. This is not easy but results in satisfaction with the development of new and interesting talents to enrich our life.

Paulette



Quilt Square



HEALING POWER

Nature owns the most mysterious healing power. In the theme of a healthy green, we see that celebration of life. Under the velvet sky sparkling with purple stars, plants are flourishing; animals are forming a life circle that never ends. In the centre, a new tree is nourished and is sprouting and growing. They are a part of my healing journey.

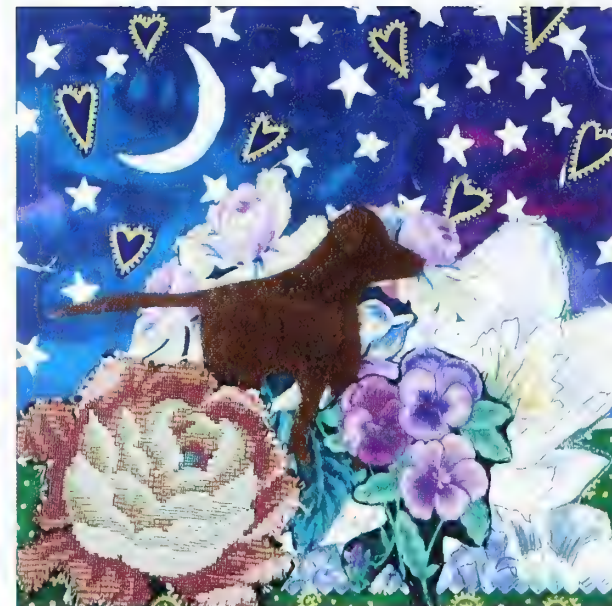
Maggie



BUTTERFLIES

Butterflies were the inspiration for my square. I bought the butterfly material a couple of years ago with the intention of making something for myself out of it. I never got around to it. Butterflies represent a few things to me, like running away from cancer. I don't deny what has happened, but at times I long for the health I had before diagnosis. They also represent the beauty of nature and the outdoors. Until this year I didn't realize how much peace and pleasure I get from gardening and being outside. They also represent the future. In their flight they are taking the cancer away from me, hopefully never to return.

Susan



AURORA BOREALIS

When adding a square to the quilt, I knew that I had to include my faithful dog. Dogs are associated with healing as well as being companions in life. My chocolate Labrador, Bruin, sits beside me when I am feeling ill or sad. His fidelity and watchfulness are comforting when I fall asleep on the couch when no one else is home. On the days when I am strong, we walk along the river valley and he stops to sniff everything. That gives me time to stop and smell the flowers. Dogs are said to be keepers of the boundaries between this world and the next. Bruin helps me here on earth and makes me see the need for unconditional love, which will help me attain eternal happiness.

The flower garden is the symbol of paradise and potentiality. The rose symbolizes the Gardens of the Blessed and represents my maternal grandmother. The lily, an emblem of the Virgin Mary, represents my own mother's endless love and support. The purple flowers in the background are my father, who works diligently and is an inspiration to me. The three pansies with their happy faces represent my husband and my two sons, who look alike. They would not like to be called pansies, of course!

Finally, the Northern Lights in the sky represent fertility. The cancer forced me to stop and re-examine my priorities. I have made changes and given birth to my new life.

Louanne

I discovered that I could enhance something that looked very plain and transform it into something beautiful that I could take pride in. My child-like spirit emerges when I create, and my curious mind constantly searches for unique possibilities and insights.





LANDMARKS

The season represented in this square is one of growth. The hills are green and alive, yet the limbs on the tree are bare and the ground beneath it is clear of leaves. The tree has been lifeless for some time, yet it stands out without dominating the scene. The sky is visible through the tree's branches, which glitter here and there with gifts, memories of the tree's life and death.

The tree represents my breast cancer – gone now but still an important part of my life's landscape. As time passes, the tree will eventually blow over. Its roots were not well developed, but the branches will still rise up from the ground. I will have to look harder to see where the tree stood; perhaps one day other landmarks will replace it as reminders of my past.

Rays of energy flow from the moon; the earth responds with chakras bursting forth from the soil. There is life, healing, growth and energy in this image. The women in my support group are represented in the colours of the sky. They are variously dark and bright, stormy and tranquil. They add vibrancy and help to carry the energy between heaven and earth. My support group sisters are part of the fabric of my life, adding richness and depth.

Jane

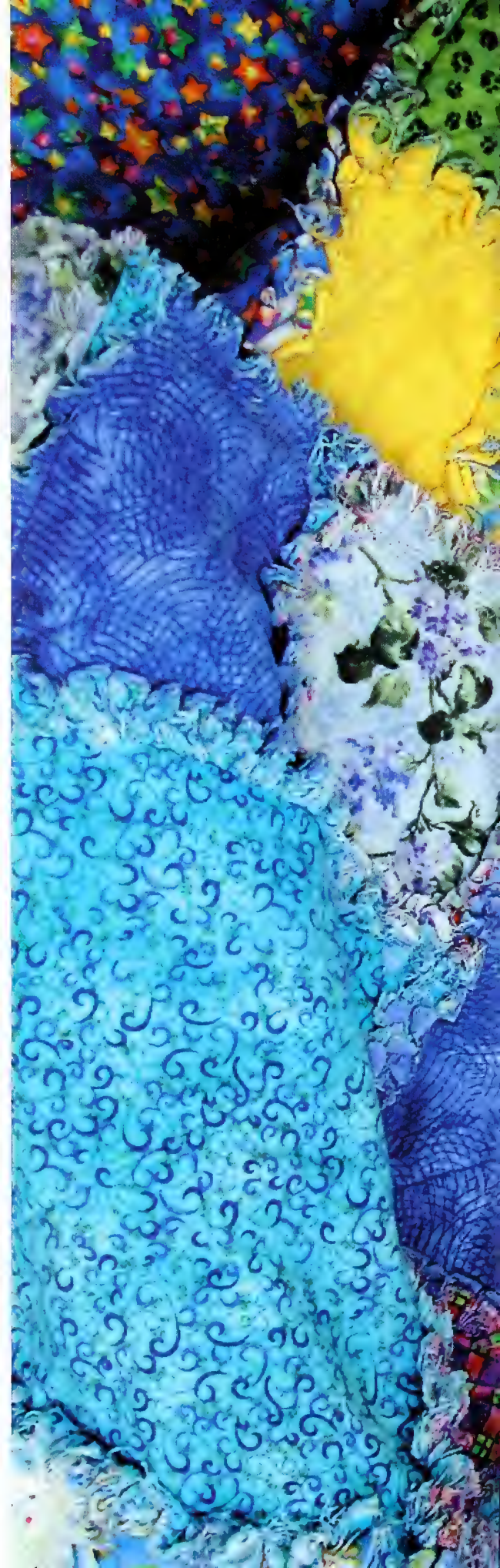


SPECIAL OCCASION

At the workshop, I was stooping over the pile of fabric trying to decide which ones would help me tell my story. I reached for some bright, cotton fabrics and then someone laid down several beautiful pieces of silk. Suddenly I was a young girl in India again, choosing fabric for a special occasion at the cloth merchant's shop. There were bolts of brightly coloured cotton khadi and Madras plaid that would do well for everyday, but for that special event only one fabric would do. I found myself reaching for the silk.

The reality of cancer has forced me to face my own mortality. The more I thought about it, the more I realized my experience with cancer has indeed been a kind of special occasion. Through it I have grown in my understanding and experience of a deep, deep faith. I appreciate more fully the way God pours out His love to me through my family and friends.

Barbara





BLANKET OF LOVE

Cancer is a lonely experience, even though I have been blessed with a wonderful family and support. It is still a lonely disease when you are the one that has it! It's like being on a small island, waiting to be engulfed and swept away. The spot I stand on is very small. My fear is often at a level that I am not able to put into words. Creativity has been powerful. I thought "Healing Stitches" was just for little old ladies. I never expected to have any interest in it. But, meeting each Friday morning for seven weeks was therapeutic. Quite honestly, quilting has been the only bright spot in my life these past few months.

Working with my hands, the fabric, pinning and sewing pieces together, became a healthy distraction from cancer. I surprised myself that I had this much zest for this kind of thing. We all worked at our own pace and our work unfolded into something more. It's very much a work in progress. I look forward to it. We have homework, too, but the pressure to complete it is a positive pressure. I've got to get my homework done so I'll be ready for the next stage. As I worked I wasn't in despair or sadness, although the threat of cancer was always there. Creativity is the beginning of something that will help me move forward with my life.

Mother's Day is five or six weeks away and I'm feeling really good right now. I don't know what the future holds with my cancer. I really felt the need to make something to give to others. So I'm in the process of making flannel quilts for each of my grown children as a gift to them for Mother's Day. I'm quite excited about it. I want them to have a keepsake, and it's time to do it now and not wait for birthdays or occasions farther away. I feel the need to do these things now.

When I am creating there is JOY in it. After my diagnosis, I thought that I would never find or feel joy again. I had this overwhelming sense that life had let me down. I did not want to trust it again, not in any way. But slowly and sweetly, joy has woven its way back into my life. It has come through quilting work and personal creativity. Although I worked without a vision of what each quilt would look like, through the process of creating, everything just unfolded before me.

These quilts for my children are really a gift of love. Both of my kids will get one on Mother's Day. They are quite different. The one for my son is made of flannel and is very warm. It's meant for comfort and good memories. I put a heart on it even though my son would find that a little too "mushy." It has to have a trademark. He's twenty-six, so I think he'll be really pleasantly surprised.

I think it will be a teary, emotional experience initially, because they will be so pleased to see what I have been able to do during my treatment. No matter what happens from this point on they'll have a part of me. They know how much I love to work with my hands and the textiles and fabrics, so it's a "keeper" for them. I'm really excited to see the expression on their faces, especially in knowing that they'll have it. I think it will bring them a real sense of good memories, of which we have many, and many blessings. I can imagine them crawling under the blanket: a "Work of Art." I come from a long line of practical people, so there's a comfort in knowing that when it's cold or they feel the least bit unwell or uneasy, it will be like crawling under a "Blanket of Love."

Rita

Quilt by Rita



CATHEDRAL GROVE

Cathedral Grove in British Columbia has always been an incredibly special place for me. When I am in this grove, I feel like I am in the most wonderful cathedral in the universe. I feel close to the Divine; so much so that I only speak in whispers. I am in awe of creation and the true majesty of nature. This is a very healing place that I go in my mind to be at one with God and totally at peace. My picture is a reminder of many special and healing hours actually spent in that cathedral, as well as the time that my mind goes there.

Velma



LANDSCAPE OF HOPE

When the long cycle of treatments began this was the image that I could concentrate on – a soothing, calming and hopeful picture.

Elvira

THE STEEPLE (opposite)

Working with my mosaic teaches me appreciation for things that give me joy, beauty and kindness. It teaches patience and creativity. The steeple gives me a sense of security and peace.

Esther





The flowers share their beauty with the world around them. In my healing journey I hope to learn more about my inner self or soul self and what gifts I may have to offer the world, my family, my friends and my community. The water represents spiritual connection with heaven and the soil or ground is our energetic connection to the earth. The green represents healing energy. They show a balance of receiving and giving.

Ken



I chose the picture that has trees, flowers and mountains. You provide all the fabrics that I need to make beautiful art. Flowers make me happy. It is so beautiful. The art that I create makes my mind in peace. I enjoyed it so much.

Kun



I ambitiously decided to create a "special place" in the fabric, my special space where I go in my mind's eye when I need to be quiet and meditate. It's a healing place with fresh, clean forest air, clear water and blue sky. There is no illness here, only life.

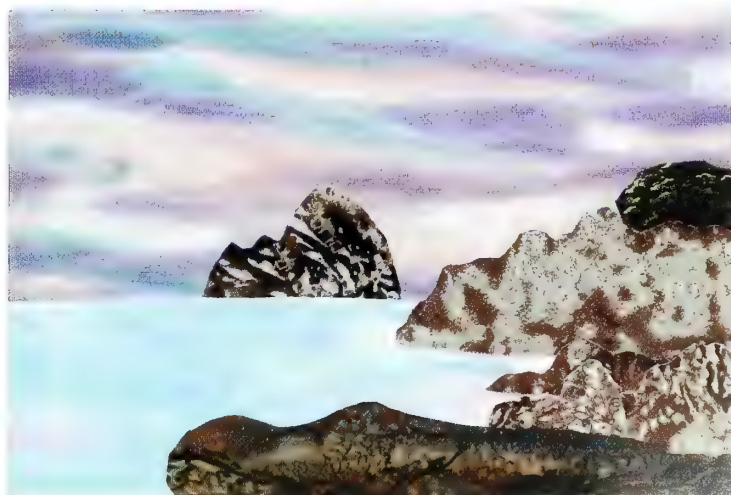
Cheryl

*Three things I want in life
...to bloom
...to grow and
...to find serenity within.*



I understand how God felt when he created the world – the ideas, the challenges of putting them together and the frustration that follows. I also understand the awe and admiration when the creation was complete. It is a feeling of joy.

Roxana



Fabr



THE ODYSSEY OF THE CHILKOOT TRAIL

When I signed up for a "Fibre Arts" class, I already had a copy of the image I wanted to create for a fabric collage. It was a photograph from a local newspaper of a young woman who was sitting on top of a mountain peak. The caption intrigued me: "A Perfect Place to Ponder Your Future." I placed the clipping on the fridge door and found myself looking at it every so often. Every day as I looked at the picture I thought, "I could do this if I put my mind to it."



The outer adventure had become an inner quest.

Following one of my surgeries, I remember feeling a calmness come over me, and while I knew I had come through a lot, I also knew that it was time to do something with my life. Others had done their part to help me get well, but now I needed to do something for myself. I was determined not to have cancer consume my life. At fifty-one, I wanted to do more things, learn more things and see more of the world.

My three brothers often talked about going on a hiking trip to Alaska. One day they began making plans, and it was certain that they were really going. I had always wanted to go there. Even as a child I remember being drawn to pictures of Alaska with its pristine mountainous landscape. Alaska became my goal! It was something to strive for. I needed an inner purpose that would remind me to take care of myself first. Whenever I found myself slipping back into my old ways and old routines, I would simply look at the photo on the fridge and the objective I was working towards.



Some days I wondered if I would ever realize this dream. For many years I was the prime caregiver to my family. Four grown-up children, two of them getting married over the next few months, another family member's illness, as well as other, extraneous concerns all factored into the equation. I knew that I would have to put many family obligations aside for a while, if I were to make the trip. To get physically ready I began to follow a strict exercise and conditioning program. Finances were another major challenge. It took a lot of self-talk to tell myself that I could really swing this!

At one point I came to the insight that nothing would stop me but an "Act of God!" The outer adventure had become an inner quest.

With aching muscles and a weary body, I finally got to sit on top of the mountain, just as in my fabric collage. And as I sat I pondered my future. I had done this for myself. I was exhausted, but this is the first step to another journey. It might not happen next month or next year, but it will happen. Maybe not a hike, next time; perhaps it will be a Broadway show in New York. Cancer has been a hard journey and at times very lonely. But, if my dreams or some of my dreams become goals and come

true, then I can only say, "It's okay to have had cancer." And, maybe it's God's way to help me look at life in a better way.

Creating this fabric collage was a creative process that allowed me to piece together in a tangible way some of the important components of this goal. The collage became a "touchstone." With each tiny snippet of fabric I found myself envisioning and, in a way, rehearsing my trek. I was doing the climb vicariously through the creation of my fabric picture.

Maribel



*Basket by Maureen
(Health Care Professional)*

Simple materials consisting of cane and yarns of varied colours and textures are fashioned into baskets, reflecting a story. The multicoloured fibres provide the potential for all kinds of creative possibilities. Some baskets are big, others small, some are delicate or whimsical, while others are more sturdy and practical, capable of storing or displaying items. The yarns themselves are the raw materials that generate the ideas of how a basket will unfold. After brief instructions and a demonstration of the process, the weaving begins. In this process, personal insights and stories unfold. In effect, the yarns tell the yarn.

Learning moments come through this creative work. As one woman said spontaneously as she moved her hands and the cane and yarn: "I'm winding to unwind." The meditative nature of a repetitive part of a creative task engenders calm and tranquility. Sometimes, too, there are moments when we sit with others and there is silence, when everyone is quietly immersed in what they are doing. Even so, we can feel a connection with everyone within the silence.

THOUGHTS ON BASKET WEAVING

What a joy it is to weave this basket!

What a joy it is to live!

So many beautiful colours radiating from a fragile beginning,
a core to its ever evolving larger shape – like our lives.

Where do all these wonderful colours and patterns come from?

Who is the weaver of this basket?

Who is the Master Weaver who weaves the body-mind
and these many-hued threads into the basket?

Like life this basket has no measure, no market value
and yet has all the wonders of being.

What is the metaphor of this basket?

Is it LOVE that encompasses living and dying – healing and wholeness?

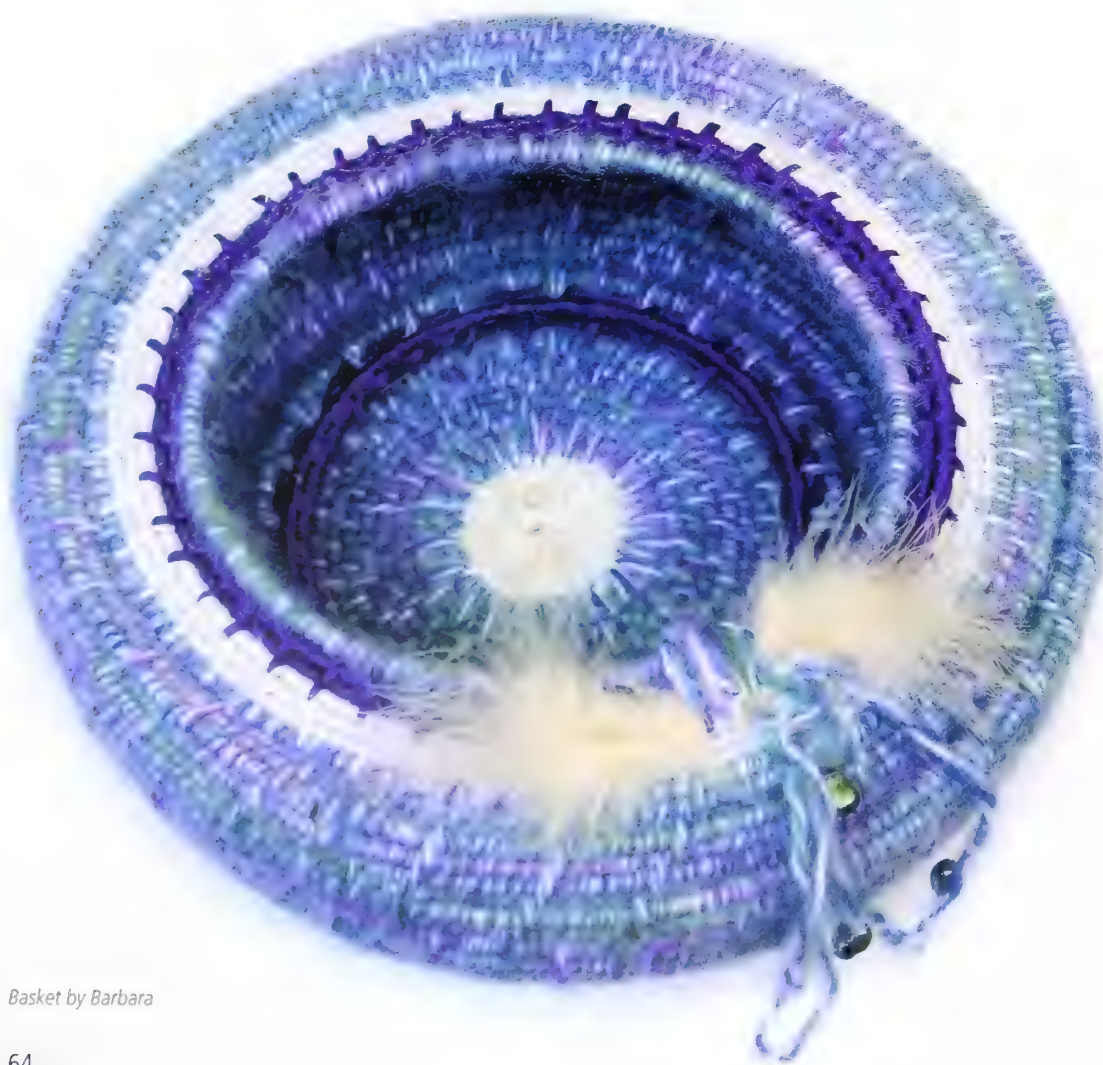
Amit



The artwork will teach you.



Basket by Steve (Psychiatrist)



Basket by Barbara

WHAT BASKET WEAVERS SAID WHILE WEAVING

On Twisting Yarns

In spite of going around and around as I learn to twist the yarns onto the cane, the process is actually centering me.

On Choosing Wool

As I started working on my basket I questioned why I had chosen the wool that I had. It was a luminous white colour with bits and pieces of gold and copper hanging from it. I wondered if it represented my life – so many facets of my life that are unfinished, in need of gathering together and reorganizing.

On Resilience

The fragile nature of the material is very much like us – the up side is resiliency. You and your material have the potential to move and change to a new vision.

On Different Baskets

From weaving my basket I am learning how many diverse textures and colours can come together to form totally different things. The many designs others have created are an inspiration to in turn incorporate and try them also. As in dealing with life's problems, there is no one way. Bending and shaping wool and cane, many different baskets are created. As we share our thoughts, we blend and shape our lives to create new, useful and different ways of handling our dilemmas. I am learning to appreciate the joy of creating.

On Slowing Down

At first I thought I'd choose the thickest yarn I could find. I liked the rich colours of the skein, but I also thought the weaving would go more quickly. In a short while, however, I found I didn't like the way it was going. Something in me was not ready to change gears or begin again; it was a kind of internal fight. I came to realize that I had to change – I had to start anew. What I found was that my new beginning brought me peace. I began going slower and I could feel a sense of peace in the slowness. The lesson for me was not to rush through life. Getting the basket done quicker didn't please me!

CANASTO TE'JIDO [BASKET]

With the occasion of the construction of this small basket came my thinking of some ideas. For example: I was making something of my own, with all the problems of a person without experience. In a way, everyone wants to create something; creativity is the key to progress. The word 'artist' is so wide in meaning, and yet there is ample spectrum within that each one of us can be an artisan of some form. Creating this little basket provoked a nice feeling inside. In a sense, we are all artists.

Rolando



FULL BASKET

My finished basket appears to be empty but as I look at it, I see it filled with precious moments. Moments filled with carefully selecting wool, which is soft and warm in appearance. I see the basket filled with the love we feel for each other, as we weave our baskets and weave our stories. I see a basket filled with hope. As we weave, we express our hopeful feelings – we hope it will turn out the way we planned – we look forward to the finished product. I see in the basket happiness – much happiness generated through lively discussion and humour. I also see clarity – the sharing amongst the group; sharing grief, sharing happiness. I see patience – the patience of trying to create something special, something to be proud of.

I also see beauty, as my basket and those of others take on character. I see courage – the courage of facing fears and the ability to persevere. I also can see pride in achievement.

So although my basket may appear empty, it is overflowing with many wonderful things that are precious to me.

Gwen

TWO BASKETS

I made two baskets. The first is tightly woven, but bright and fun! It's a small basket with a lid. This is just like me, holding my lid closed and letting you see the outside while I reflect a bright and sunny look. When you open the basket, it is basically the same, but the outside flowers are brighter and it is deeper than it looks.

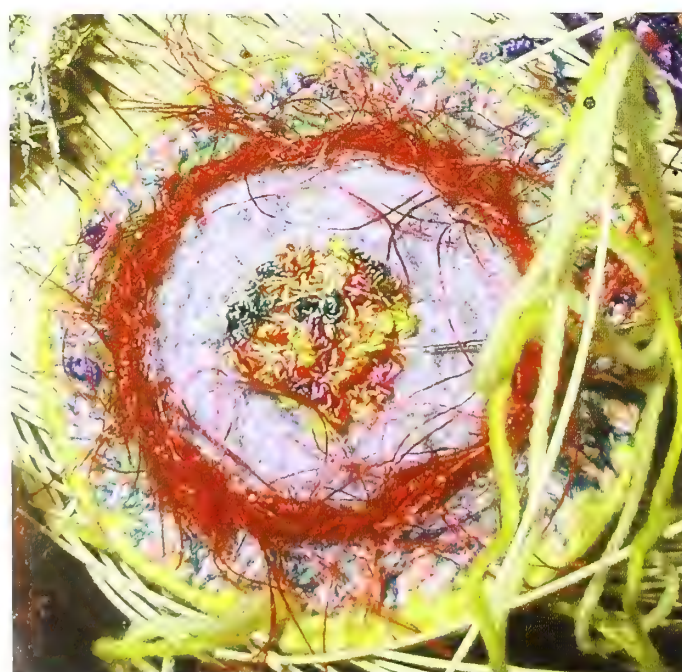
My second basket is open with an edge that reaches out. It is softer and less brash. This is the comforting side of me wanting to allow you to rest and be calm with me. This is what my three-year-old son calls getting "tucked in."

My nervous self is brighter (like the first basket). There is a lot of nervous energy and some showing off. My relaxed self is open, warm, soft and understanding. My pain is represented in two solid lines of colour on my bright basket. This is a chink in my armour!

I have had a beautiful life with a great childhood. All of life's doors have been open to me. Cancer joins me to the world. In my suffering I have come to understand art better. I'm less judgmental and I am more patient.

We are joined in our pain, but it doesn't have to be ugly. Am I glad I have cancer? No. Will I live with her? Yes, and perhaps one day we will be friends.

Fawna



PLECIENEIE KOSZYKOW [STORIED BASKET]

Powerful feelings were with me as I began to weave my basket. I was taken back to a time during World War II when my grandmother, my mother (age fourteen at the time) and my auntie (twenty-eight at the time) were living in a little town near Warsaw. With tremendous fear and a sense of foreboding, they found themselves being moved by the Germans to a small village. People from these villages were usually sent to labour and concentration camps and my mother and her sister were on the list.

My grandmother and her daughters were accomplished knitters. They could make beautiful garments out of potato sacks and other discarded pieces of fabric that they pulled apart. Sweaters, jackets and dresses were all created from these salvaged threads. As it was wartime, articles of clothing were not available at stores in the village. However, German officers and their wives soon noticed the talents of these hard-working women. For five years, my grandmother and her two daughters crafted these garments, all for a piece of bread or a few pieces of coal. All the while, their creativity and ingenuity saved them from the camps.

As I share this story, it is hard to believe that these words are coming from my mouth. I never thought I would speak of this to anyone. I remember making a promise to myself as a child that I would never be a slave. What happened to my mother and grandmother would never happen to me. Every time I saw a



beautiful hand knit sweater I would buy it and then put it away. I had handmade items everywhere, in suitcases, boxes and drawers. I saw the making of such items as a form of slavery and associated handwork, generally, with being used in some way. I would never lower myself to weaving, knitting, repairing a garment or even sewing on a button. When anything like that was required, I would send it to a tailor. Throughout my life I relied on my intellect. My creative side was ignored and tucked away. I had not made a single thing in my life.

As I wove this little golden basket, I began to realize how diminished my life had become, all because of these early attitudes and beliefs. I have only allowed myself to be a spectator of the creativity. I am now making changes.

Margaret



Dolls of various kinds and sizes have been created from many different materials. Some from fabric, others made by hand from fine clay and then put together with intricate armatures. Other dolls were fashioned from porcelain using a mould. No matter what the material used, each doll became a means of expressing one's experience.

The dolls sculpted entirely by hand took ten months to create. Participants met for two hours every week, working with a professional sculptor at various times. A psychologist facilitated the process work each week. These were precious months in that participants had the privilege of coming to know one another over this extended time. Moments of joy, delight, humour and flashes of insight were shared, along with moments of sadness. The time of creating was about balance and connection and how we are learners and teachers of each other.



CONNECTIONS

Since almost all Yuzdepski children are blonde, the golden hair symbolizes not only the spirit of past and present generations, but also the wheat fields of Saskatchewan, the place of our birth. The wheat she holds symbolizes tradition, Ukrainian Christmas and the culinary skills of our family. This spirit of family makes me feel whole. The remaining symbols are reflections of a cancer patient: the Inukshuk – an ancient symbol of friendship, comfort, guidance and hope; the “moon stone” – relieves frustrations and lifts spirits. The memories that encompass the making of my healing doll bring me joy, and joy is part of the healing process.

Iris





DAWNA QUIXOTE

The soul doll that I have created is the idealized version of how I see my struggle with cancer. If I could create a champion to fight for me, it would be her. Her name is "Dawna Quixote" and she is a "duellist." She is the physical incarnation of my desire to remain engaged yet balanced as I dance with what the fates have sent me. The image of a duellist came to me as the perfect physical representation of how I want to cope with my health challenges. Fencing requires great balance, courage, agility and grace, as does negotiating the swings and round-a-bouts of any chronic disease.

Like her famous namesake, my champion is also on a quest. Hers is to keep a physical and emotional balance and to stay focused in the present moment. Her goal is to enjoy life in the face of constant challenges that the disease may present.

This will require all her tenacity, optimism and indefatigable spirit for, as Don Quixote observed, "The fortunes of war, more than any others, are subject to frequent fluctuations" (Cervantes).

Lauren



CALLING DOWN THE WIND

The greatest and most obvious transformation has to do with recovering my sense of connection with childhood and spirit. While I was creating one of my dolls, I was flooded with memories concerning a time in my youth where I felt my spirit "as I talked to the wind." It was a whole relationship with nature that I had forgotten.

I was much more of a free spirit as a child; the process of creating these dolls has allowed me to return to this very special time in my life. The next doll I want to create will be for my sister, to help me begin to transform this relationship. I want to give her this gift to show her that I have some understanding of her experience.

Doll by Janice

Lauren



Doll by Zelma



From left to right: Dolls by Zelma, Kathie, Daria, Sharon and Darlene

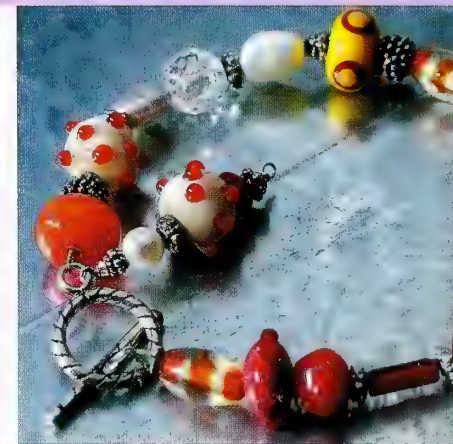
SOUL DOLL

Today, the magic happened. I kept working and working with the fabric when suddenly everything fell into place. I feel alive today. My doll tells me that there is a free spirit within me. One that is not the same, reliable person who plays the same, predictable roles but rather one who is willing to take risks and create something new. It is what my spirit needed after chemo. I felt I had changed but didn't know who or what I would become. Maybe God is telling me to stop trying to figure things out and to just be. It feels good for the struggle to stop. To be at peace with who I am and to just be. I wonder what my next doll will say.

Kae

Beads of varied colours, shapes, sizes, textures and materials are provided for participants to combine in unique ways. There is something enticing about the feel of a bead in one's hand, and a sense of playfulness in placing the beads in a way that is pleasing to the eye. Participants choose from a vast collection of expensive and inexpensive beads. Trays of beads placed on the work table provide a smorgasbord for the tactile and visual senses. Pearls, semi-precious stones, Bali silver pieces and lamp work beads are but a few of the choices participants have as they create their own healing bracelet. A strong beading wire, crimp beads, Bali silver spacers and clasps of different styles are also provided.

Beads have been with us for thousands of years. Within this span of time, they have acquired a fascinating history. The word "bead," derived from the old English word "bede," meaning "prayer," makes it easy to see why so many participants find beading a meditative experience. Beads can be a touchstone for tapping into that serene, still place inside. The solitary, thoughtful manipulation of them enhances this contemplative state of mind and the repetitious handling of beads helps concentrate on spiritual needs and awareness. Participants tell us how calming it is to simply run their fingers over and around the beads.



WHAT PARTICIPANTS SAID WHILE BEADING

On Colours and Shapes

At this point, the only creativity is in the colours and shapes enhancing each other. The magic of beads is in the wedding of colours and shapes. One feels the beads and receives calmness and serenity. This is my element; I could do this all day long. Every single bead takes my curiosity to a different level with its shape, its brightness and its clarity. This is a very soothing and relaxing exercise for the mind and the soul.

On Memories

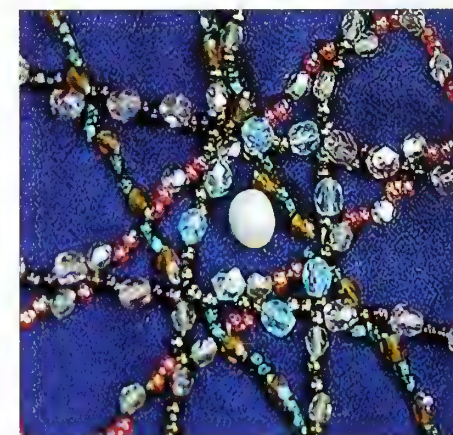
My first effort at choosing from the multitude of beads overwhelmed me. What especially comes to my mind is the delicate pink, crocheted dress that my mother made for me for my fifth birthday. It had the most exquisite row of pink crystal beads marching down my innocent, unscarred little chest. Ah, memories! How I loved that little dress and today I recall how I would so lovingly finger those beautiful pink crystals. And of course, I am also reminded of my mother, which makes today another heartfelt day.

On Taking a Chance

Working with beads has made me aware of the numerous ways they can be combined, much like various aspects of one's life. And if the combination isn't quite working, changes can be made. But one has to be willing to risk or take a chance.

On Freedom

Beading this morning I felt luxuriously free...free to experience and wonder at the many marvels of colour, texture and shape. Free to immerse myself in a different reality, far removed from the world of cancer. How rarely do we allow ourselves this type of opportunity.





Storied Pouch

The Storied Pouch is a distinctive way of conveying important life stories by stringing together beads between small, personally meaningful objects. When we take the time to sift through drawers, jewellery boxes, and other places where most of us stash our memorabilia, we are engaged in a process of recalling memories that are a part of our larger life story.

Beautifully coloured pieces of suede material are fashioned into a pouch. Each pouch is embellished in some way on the outside. The pouch itself becomes a part of the overall story. Heavy thread is then used to string the items, so that ultimately it can be secured to the inside seam of the pouch. This makes it possible to tuck the “story on a string” back inside the pouch when one has finished telling it.

LIFELINE

My pouch has a tail, which is my lifeline. It has symbols and treasures that characterize my life. There are gifts from my grandchildren, treasured memories of my mother and a leaf from a necklace I wore when I married my Bob. A piece of Chinese Jade from a very dear friend and a giraffe reminding me of my daughter Carrie and the trip we took to Africa. A cancer heart showing how much cancer has changed my life. A gold charm of paintbrushes and a palette, a turtle from Carrie, blue and white pottery and amber, a charm from Bob and my first bead. These are some of the many symbols of love, friends, beauty, endurance and survival – perhaps all just reminders of the beauty of an ordinary life.

Judy



Pouch by Carolyn

*This is what creativity can be about:
contrasts that pull together into a thing of beauty.*

WHAT PARTICIPANTS SAID ABOUT STORIED POUCHES

On Contrasts and Beauty

For my beaded pouch I used differing shapes and a rainbow of colours. There are contrasts of shining and matte textures of glass beads and semi-precious stones and freshwater pearls, and of order and flowing lines. This is what creativity can be about; contrasts that pull together into a thing of beauty. In the process of making this beaded pouch I connected with my own creativity, contrasts and beauty on a deeper level than I have ever done. It can happen when one boldly goes where one has never gone before.

Pouch by Evangeline



On Scattered Bits

As I look at the beads I have put on the outside of my story pouch, I see that I have started out with a tight design of dark colours surrounded by scattered bits. So, do these scattered bits mean that I'm coming unravelled? No, they represent pieces of new positive energy that I need to gather up.





Judy Hamilton
(used with permission)



LEARN, GROW AND EXPERIENCE

Painting is, in many senses, like living. We start from scratch, and then build over time. No one knows what the end product will be, but one can imagine. Stroke by stroke, the picture in front of us evolves. New colours cover old scars. The layer beneath is not forgotten, but allows a new layer to be built over it. Layer by layer, the figure becomes more formed. Our experience grows and more complexity is added.

At the same time, our emotions begin to come out more and more as our work matures. Eventually, there comes a time when we say, "I am done." A character is formed and is remembered. The process of creating art is as important, if not more so, as the end product itself. Kierkegaard said, "Life can only be understood backwards, but must be lived forward." Living is, in many senses, like painting.

Dr. David Hui
Medical Resident

Drawing & Painting

Drawing and painting are at the heart of many Arts in Medicine experiences. Participants work in a rich variety of media, from coloured pencils and pastels to gold leaf, using a wide range of techniques, from carefully honouring ancient religious icons to freely imagining the highly personal imagery of mandalas. Artist facilitators for painting and drawing classes may provide photographs or examples of highly stylized images that serve as a source of inspiration for participants.

Arts in Medicine instructors are exceptional in the manner in which they encourage and draw out “the artist within.” Along with their professional skills and experience, these artists are compassionate and caring individuals. Although we often become totally immersed in the painting process, there is also opportunity for quiet conversation. Each class ends with an exchange of ideas, where we share our personal learning and “a-ha!” moments, which have come to us while painting.





A M A N D A L A

can best be described as a circular art form, taken from Sanskrit, meaning centre or circle. Mandalas are not only rich in symbolism; they give visual expression to various facets of our emotional and spiritual domains. Psychoanalyst Carl Jung created mandalas regularly, and came to see that they reflected a deeply personal, yet universal language. Creating a mandala is meditative, as one looks inward. The process of drawing and colouring seems to facilitate a connection with the still centre inside, where quiet wisdom dwells. As a healing tool, the mandala can allow one to experience a feeling of wholeness, even in the midst of a health crisis, or any life challenge. Many well recognized mandalas throughout the world are breathtakingly beautiful. Creating a mandala allows one to express a myriad of awe-inspiring images and ideas we all hold inside. Connie, an Arts in Medicine facilitator, introduced her sister Linda to the mandala. Their sister Betty had been diagnosed with cancer and it was a challenging time for the whole family. Knowing about the healing power of mandalas, Connie felt this simple circular form might be of help. Their drawings and insights are among the following mandalas, illustrating how this art form can provide a way to cope with stress and anxiety through focused attention, thereby tapping into an inner calm.



Mandala by Linda



Mandala by Hyoko



MY SAFE PLACE

I wish I had a window seat
The sunlight coming through the trees
A birdsong – with a message of hope and
flight and freedom to spread my
wings and fly if I choose, or to simply
perch and dream.
In my mind I have a window seat
Where I can feel safe and peaceful.
Feel the peace that my heart desires...
To forget for some glorious moments about
the ups and downs of my life and others.
A Robin comes to visit – the promise
of Spring – of Newness, and the
recurrence of freshness and lovely
song that warms my heart.

Linda



SNOWDROP

Just as the beautiful snowdrop pushes up through the frozen, snow-covered ground so, too, we find ourselves at times struggling to rise above adverse conditions. We reach inside ourselves and search for outer resources to gain strength and determination. It takes courage, but we owe it to ourselves and to God to make the choice to at least give it our best effort.

Linda



LIFE

From our tiny beginning at birth we stretch and grow, reaching out, following varied paths of lightness and darkness. But I believe that we come into this world with a purpose: to learn the lessons our souls set out to learn, and then return into the light to contemplate and share this wisdom with other souls.

Linda



A SAFE PLACE

My safe place is in solitude. The mountains, the trees, the water and the land provide my sanctuary. The sun gives the light that wraps me in warmth and energy – rejuvenating my spirit. In my safe place I am out of harm's way.

Ron



HEALING OF THE HEART

The flower has heart-shaped petals unfolding from a blackish centre that symbolizes the hurt, anger and bewilderment I've felt over a very few close friends' reactions or lack of reaction to my having cancer. The yellow spiralling out from the black represents my initial attempts to accept or deal with broken relationships. The green and blue represent the wonderful times we shared hiking, skiing and enjoying the outdoors.

As I created this mandala, I became hopeful that things would work out; hence the rainbow. It is only partially across the sky at this point, but it is hopeful.

Lorene



INTERTWINED HANDS

The intertwined hands symbolize the many supportive hands that have been part of my journey with cancer. Initially there were the hands of my doctor holding her phone and telling me the results of the biopsy immediately, so that I didn't have to wait for an appointment, perhaps imagining something far worse than it was. There were the many hands of the doctors, nurses and radiologists at the cancer clinic, all caring and professional.

Then even more important were the caring hands of my family and friends – bringing me flowers, food, hugs and love. Also, the many volunteers offering tea, cookies and a smile when one felt a bit down.

All these hands intertwined together have provided a security net that's been there for me all along this journey – never allowing me to fall into despair.

Lorene



Hands by Ron



UNRAVELLED

This illustration comes from a dream, in which I was talking with a woman. I felt that I needed to explain to her why I was doing things the way I was. She was standing against a wall and to her right was a rattan wreath hanging on the wall. Almost as soon as I began my explanations, the wreath began to unravel. It was distracting me and I began fumbling for words. The unravelling then became noisy and the woman kept saying, "I don't understand what you are saying. Tell me again. I don't understand." She kept repeating these phrases and I kept explaining, but the noise of the unravelling got louder and louder. I couldn't even hear what I was saying...I woke up feeling anxious and very frustrated at not getting my point across.

This dream came at a time when my life seemed to be coming apart at the seams. I was having difficulty communicating with my boss, and not enjoying my work any longer. I wanted to be with my sister who was struggling with cancer – in and out of the hospital. I wanted to be alone and quiet with her, but there were always people around, talking loud and spinning with high anxiety. I wanted to scream – to make my wishes understood – but I could not find the way to do that because everyone who loved her wanted to be with her. I understood that even if it wasn't what I wanted, it was the way it happened to be.

Linda

SOUL'S JOURNEY

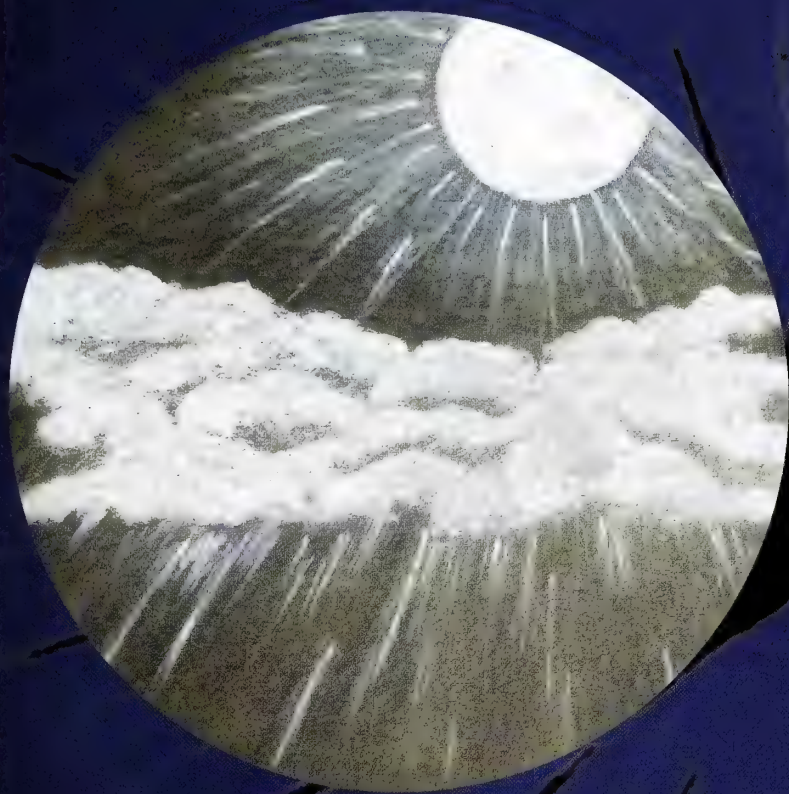
Our journey through life on earth is a colourful one. We are birthed from white light. We learn extensively about colour and what creates white light. From our beginnings as children we learn the primary and secondary colours, and as we grow, gain experience and knowledge from nature and people we encounter. We also learn how colours affect us, how to make the world around us more pleasurable, and learn to see what a beautiful gift we have been given. Then, at the end of our journey, we are transformed and cross over into the light once again – white light – collection of all Heaven's colours



Mandala series by Linda

STAR LIGHT

Wishing on a star, wondering and dreaming are rituals that give us hope and strength, our faith in what is to come. They are part of what gives us the courage to look forward to each and every day with anticipation.



LIGHT EVERLASTING

Night has fallen, yet light remains...although sometimes it does seem very difficult to see. It is necessary though, to avoid the depths of depression and desolation, to remember that each night is merely a short time in the movement of our earth. Each night is followed by another day of newness and light. Even when we know our days are at the end we need to remember and have faith that we are merely transforming back into light everlasting.



SOUL SONGS

Soul songs may need wide open space to be heard and felt. It is difficult to listen and hear our soul speaking to us in the busy, frenzied state of our world – particularly in the increasing growth of our cities. The noises obscuring the voice of our souls are bothersome sounds that cause so much stress to our being. It is necessary, I believe, to take time to at least visit places where there is quiet and peace – the country with miles and miles of empty space, birds singing, big skies... neighbourhood parks with beautiful trees singing in the wind...the mountains with lakes and meadows of flowers...or the sea coast where whale songs carry throughout our vast ocean waters. Then we can hear and listen to our soul songs.



PLANT THE SEED OF LOVE

As the stars shine in the skies and flowers flourish all over our earth, I think how much it is on earth as it is in heaven. Flowers spread their seeds with the intention of growing again and again. Our own seeds are bits of love spread throughout our world. Love starts within us; we find the source of it in our spiritual beliefs and send it outward by our actions and thoughts. Love then flourishes and is passed on to others again and again. We cannot help but be affected by this – God's gift to the world.

Linda

A HEALING LIGHT

A visualization exercise can be a great way to begin creating a mandala. On the day that I drew this mandala, I imagined a beam of light entering the top of my head and spreading out through my whole body. The light seemed to stop at my heart, where it began to spin like a pinwheel, throwing healing energy and a multitude of blossoms, a joyful feeling. The bird at the centre is an image I have associated with myself for some time. It goes deeper than my experience as a vocalist.

Donna



HEALING MANDALA FOR BETTY

My sister Betty was very ill when I drew this healing mandala for her. It was intended to give her hope and to show her my hope and love as well. I drew the tree of life pouring itself into her heart, and I drew water, which is where all life begins. I also drew a star to represent hope or "something to shoot for." Months later as I look at this drawing, I see different things in it. Betty is gone and I see the tree of life as sparse and bent and giving its last. I see the water sweeping her away toward the star or another dimension. The mandala was working at both levels – the present but also the precognitive, which I could not see at the time I created it. I marvel at the process.

Linda



HEARTS

These little forming hearts or droplet hearts represent the essence of our potential to reach out to others and trust in them to help us realize our inner love. In turn this love will flow through to our very core and cycle back to people who need our loving kindness.

Mary

Spirit Animals

For many, feeling a connection with something in nature is calming to mind, body and spirit. This connection can also come through painting animals or birds. Often we are so rushed in our day-to-day lives that we take little time to really observe what is around us. Painting an animal or a bird requires concentration and keen observation of detail. It is in this place of focused attention that we become still and in this quiet place we are only aware of "the moment."



THE MIGHTY BALD EAGLE

Back from the brink of extinction, the Mighty Bald Eagle has been triumphant. Those sharp, keen eyes now survey its surroundings, giving this bird a sense of majesty. When it spreads its enormous wings to fly gracefully overhead, this regal creature sends my spirit soaring.

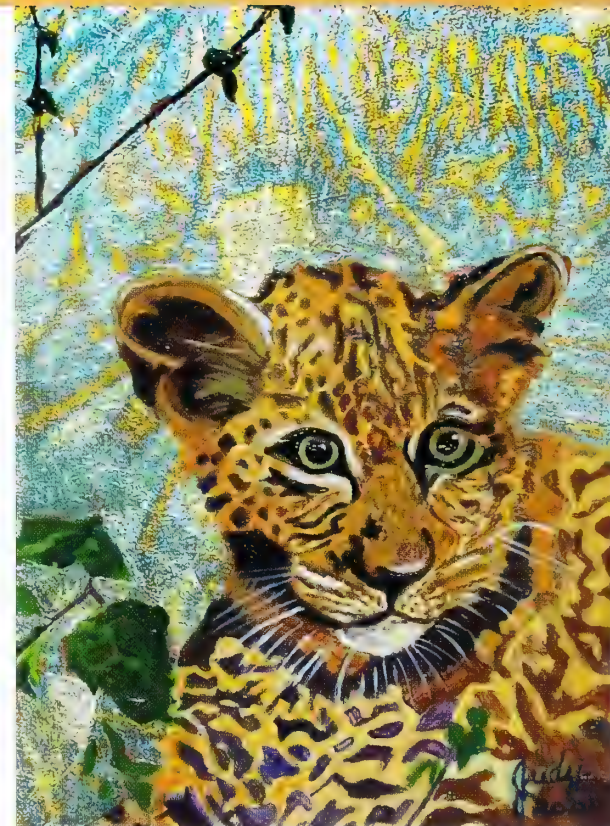
Donna



MY ELEPHANT

Elephants are very family oriented. They are proud and powerful animals. Painting the elephant reinforced my love for family. It made me feel powerful: the cancer would not take away my positive spirit and attitude toward living a full and complete life. Now I enjoy each special moment with my family and I am happy and excited about all the new adventures awaiting me. Life is just waiting for me to capture every delicious moment.

Judy



THE LEOPARD

I'm not one to wish my life away, especially the beautiful spring and summer that bring so much personal energy and healing to my body. The mere thought of winter approaching with its icy fingers has chilled my bones and my thoughts. My consolation for the bleak season approaching was the thought of, and anticipation of, painting. For several months I'd considered what animal I wanted to paint, deciding on a giraffe. However, when the big day came and I had a chance to look over the materials, I spotted a photograph of a baby leopard and he just "spoke" to me. I knew I had to paint the little fellow.

Judy

Despite my initial awkwardness and discomfort, it feels good to do something creative when I'm coping with change. It seems to turn on my internal engine.



Wolf by Hyoko

WILD THING

As I was deciding what animal to paint, our eyes met. I knew without hesitation that the wolf was exactly for me. The look in Wild Thing's eyes was similar to a real life moment a wolf and I shared at Upper Kananaskis Lake twenty years ago.

A friend and I were hiking around the lake and stopped for a rest. I sat on a log, looked around, and spotted a wolf about seventy metres away in the forest. Our eyes met and we stared at each other for ten seconds, then went our separate ways. What a frightful moment. Whew!

From that time on, I've had recurring dreams of wolves attacking me while I fight them back. Perhaps this was a sign that something was not right with my health. These nightmares continued for many years until I eventually ended up winning a fight against the wolves in my dreams. Soon after this last dream, I became ill and eventually had emergency surgery to remove a large brain tumour that was misdiagnosed as a migraine condition.

Were these dreams warnings from my spirit animal? I believe they were. I am now feeling healthy, strong, wild and free. My nightmares have stopped, but I still feel Wild Thing walking side by side with me.

Jerry



Zebra by Joanna

HOPE

Last year I chose a lion to paint because he looked so relaxed. I always admired the zebra. Not sure why, but I wished I would have painted one. After being diagnosed with only nine months to a year to live, my hope was shattered. As this program started up again in October, I honestly didn't believe I would have the opportunity to paint a zebra. I knew he needed a name. When I got home I told my son I was painting a zebra but he needs a name. Without hesitation, he said, "Call him 'Hope.'" Perfect, I thought, since this is all I've chosen to go on. My nine-year-old son continues to inspire me with his spirit and honesty.

Lora



SATISFIED

As I chose my picture, a lion was speaking to me. He looked calm, the sun shining off his mane, and his eyes looked satisfied. As I began to draw him on my canvas he seemed to turn into an angry beast. I don't know what I did but he was very angry. I didn't want to come back to the class and I began to get an awful headache. It was as though I was unable to control the situation.

I think I was relating it to my having cancer. I was angry about that, questioning whether I have any control over my health. I chose to deal with the situation and returned the following week. With minor touch-ups I began to see a new life in my lion. He looked calmer, satisfied and relaxed. That is how I sometimes feel about having cancer. It's not so bad. I'm thankful for all that I have learned.

When I brought my painting home I asked my eight-year-old son to look at the lion and tell me what the painting was saying to him. He surprised me and told me exactly what I was feeling. He looked and then after a moment he said, "Everything will be okay, that's what the lion is telling me Mom." What a satisfying statement that was.

Lora



GRACED WITH DELICACY

The giraffe is an animal of elegance and beauty. It is graced with a delicacy and a fragile quality that mirrors life. Like the giraffe, we try to carry ourselves tall and proudly through all adversity. The giraffe displays its beautifully coloured spots on the outside. We sometimes carry our scars on the surface, but many of the emotional scars are found deep inside.

The giraffe treads a difficult road trying to survive the dangers of living on the savannah. People living with cancer face a similar dilemma. Living becomes about very small, important details in life. We try to protect ourselves from the common cold germ, which could send our whole immune system into a spiral of unpleasant events.

Like the giraffe, our lives are fragile. Although the road is a difficult one, we always manage to pick up our feet, one after the other, and find a tremendous surge of energy to keep living. This is our healing, this is our inner peace.

Judy



WHY THE EAGLE?

For several weeks now, since beginning this exceptional painting class, I have pondered the question, "Why did I choose the bald-headed eagle?" This majestic bird has always fascinated me! But this year, on my annual retreat to Qualicum Beach, each day on my five-minute journey to the beach, I would see "the eagle." Usually he was perched at the very top of his Douglas fir. Some days he would be on the second branch down from the top. I would stand and stare at him, so majestic, so proud and so confident – on his high branch. I could only imagine what he could see – towering above the rest of us; his was a view over the ocean, over the small islands to the mainland. He could see storm clouds building in the distance – long before the rest of us knew of the storm. He would sense the changes in the wind – the velocity, the direction. I wonder what he would do with this information.

When the eagle was not perched in his fir tree, I would see him flying above the water. Flying seemed so easy. His strong wings moved slowly and rhythmically. How could I not choose the bald-headed eagle? He was in my life for ten days – my retreat days. He had to stay in my life. I so admired his freedom, his strength and power, his close vision, his ability to easily soar above the earth.

During my journey through cancer, my freedom was limited. Professionals, experts – all very caring people – made decisions for me: they told me that I needed surgeries and when, that I needed chemo and what type and frequency, then radiation – every day, at a specific time. During chemo I felt sick, lost weight, felt dizziness, needed help – with such limited freedom, I was unable to soar! Now that I have completed treatments, I want the freedom, vision and power of the bald-headed eagle!

Babette



GREAT HORNED OWL

While working on this painting, it became clear to me that I had chosen the owl because I hope to gain wisdom from this cancer experience. I believe that God always includes opportunity at the core of a crisis. For me this opportunity is lessons about life, love and self. My job, like the owl's, is to see through the darkness of this time to the many blessings hidden inside and to make the most of the opportunities that my cancer experience has given me.

Kathie



CHICKADEE

When I chose the chickadee to paint, I felt a need to pick up the little bird, hold him close and protect him. I suppose it came from the way I think of myself – nurturing and caring and protective of others. This was actually the feeling I wanted to have for myself – to be cared for and protected like this enchanting chickadee.

As I continued to paint, I experienced an entirely different interpretation of what I was creating. I saw this chickadee as something very much at peace. Peaceful with himself and with the world around him – there was contentment with just being.

As I carried on painting week after week, I was surprised to again see another perspective of my work. As layer upon layer was added, an intensity of colours appeared to come forth from the canvas.

As the painting was completed, the one thing that I felt stood out was not the chickadee at all. It was the light – the light that I saw surrounding the chickadee. The light appeared to get brighter and brighter as I came to the end of the painting.

Valerie

Icons dating back to the 13th Century have inspired these works of art. We follow the egg tempura method, which is a unique medium for painting icons. This requires more patience, as the artist must use smaller strokes of the brush to attain the desired effect.

Popular images of angels have circulated widely over the past decade, on everything from calendars and murals to greeting cards and mugs. The experience of painting an angel adds layers of personal meaning to each image. Pure gold leaf was used for halos, and variegated gold leaf as a background to the image.

ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI

My reasons for painting St. Francis of Assisi are literal. The wonderful man I have lost was also passionate about nature, particularly birds. My dear husband was a birdwatcher from the time he was a young boy. St. Francis helps me to remember the gentleness and the kindness of my husband.

Painting the icon relaxed me and helped me move on. I come in daily contact with things that remind me of my husband, and I think that some of these things will remain with me for the rest of my life. The icon is reminiscent of his love of nature. It helps remind me to convey to others the information he passed on to me. I was never really interested in his hobby, but I am finding I learned a lot more about ornithology than I thought I had, by osmosis.

The icon reminds me that I cannot run away from those constant reminders, but I must embrace them and enjoy them.

Barbara



Icon by Linda



Icon by Jackie

WORKING FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT

Layers of illumination
Sulphurous egg yoke transforms
To glue the radiance
Into form

I vividly remember what a struggle it was to begin to paint and at the same time I didn't have the strength or capacity to pull my thoughts to the written word. I could barely speak. Tears flooded me all the time. My hands had neither the strength nor the agility I was used to.

Evangeline



Icon by Irene

THE WHOLE WORLD COULD STOP

When I am painting, the whole world could stop and I wouldn't notice. I become so absorbed in the painting process that I am fairly oblivious to what is going on around me. I feel a sense of accomplishment and pride in my work. I also at times feel incredulous that I could actually do something like this. Sometimes it feels as if someone else is guiding my hand, a force I cannot see. It is so difficult to put the brush down. I could do this forever.

Judy

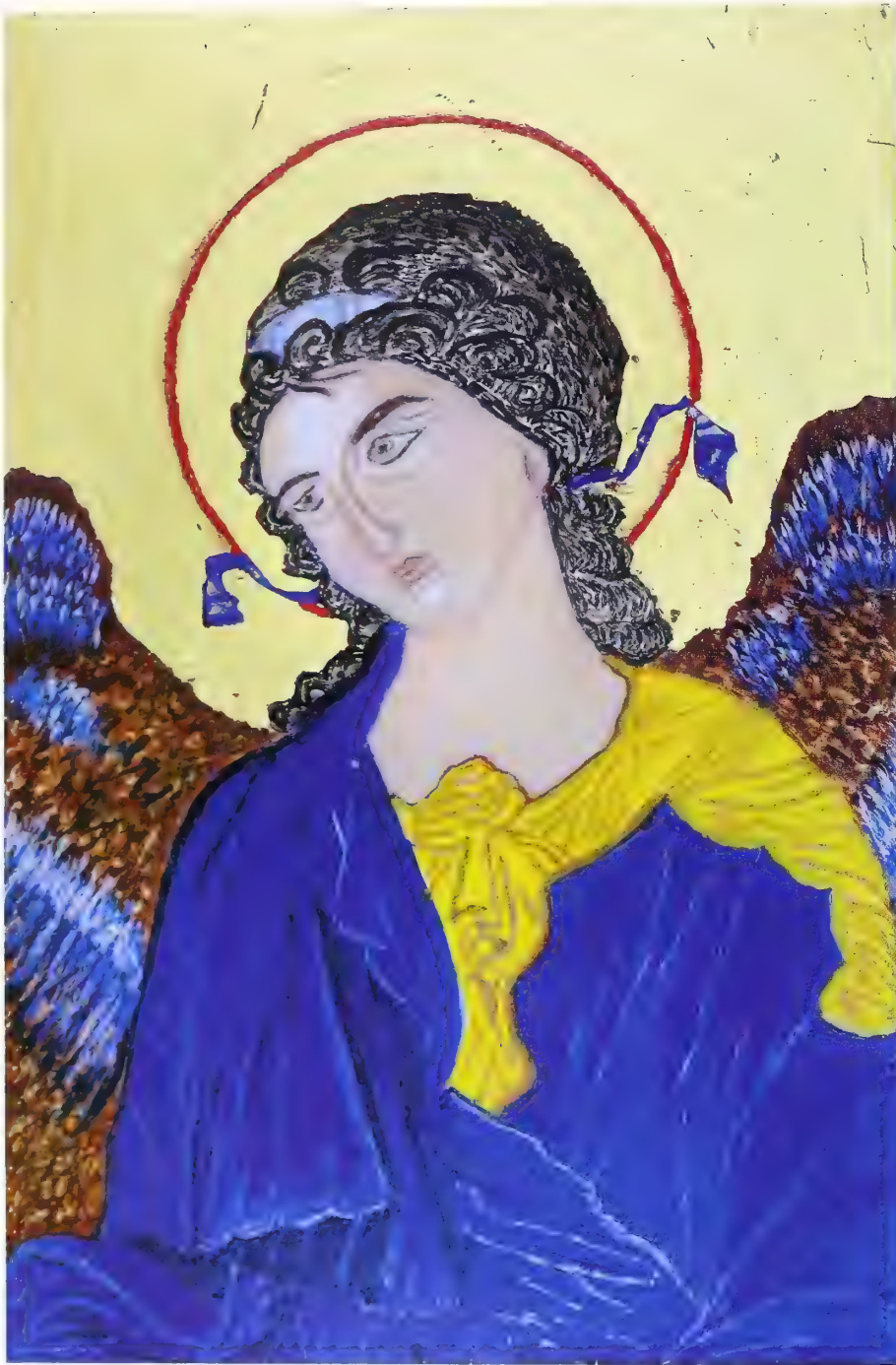


WARM EMBRACE

I chose this particular piece because of its aged look and the compassionate eyes. These kindly eyes are like a warm embrace, patient and yet accepting what life brings. I love the timelessness of this tradition and the almost transcendental quality of icon painting. As we painted icons there was stillness and peace. It was as though we had all gone back centuries in time, and in so doing, touched the eternal.

Julia

Today while I was painting I noticed the world around me stopped, and I was in a stress free environment.



EMBRACING STILLNESS

I love how my painting is developing. The deliberate, unhurried strokes slow me down, and I feel peaceful. I never, ever felt I could paint an icon, and I love it.

Jackie



QUIET CONTEMPLATION

I was meant to choose this particular icon and I love it more each time I see it. When I look at it each day, it will remind me of the peacefulness I felt in doing it and how it took me away from other problems I perceive in my life.

Take time to be still, clear your mind, enjoy the process of creating and remember to breathe. The countenance of my icon is contemplative; life needs to be looked at from a place of quiet deliberation and sometimes with a sense of distance. I think this could equate to "don't sweat the small stuff."

Anonymous



Painting by James

MADONNA AND CHILD

This is a story of life, of caring for and holding one another, helping others carry their sorrow and pain and giving them support as best we can. We must also love ourselves and take care of self first, in order to have the strength and energy to be a positive influence for others. These are my beliefs but it is not my story. My story is locked inside and through art I am looking for a way to get in touch with it and bring it out. Art is a way to experience my true self.

Lois



DEVOTION

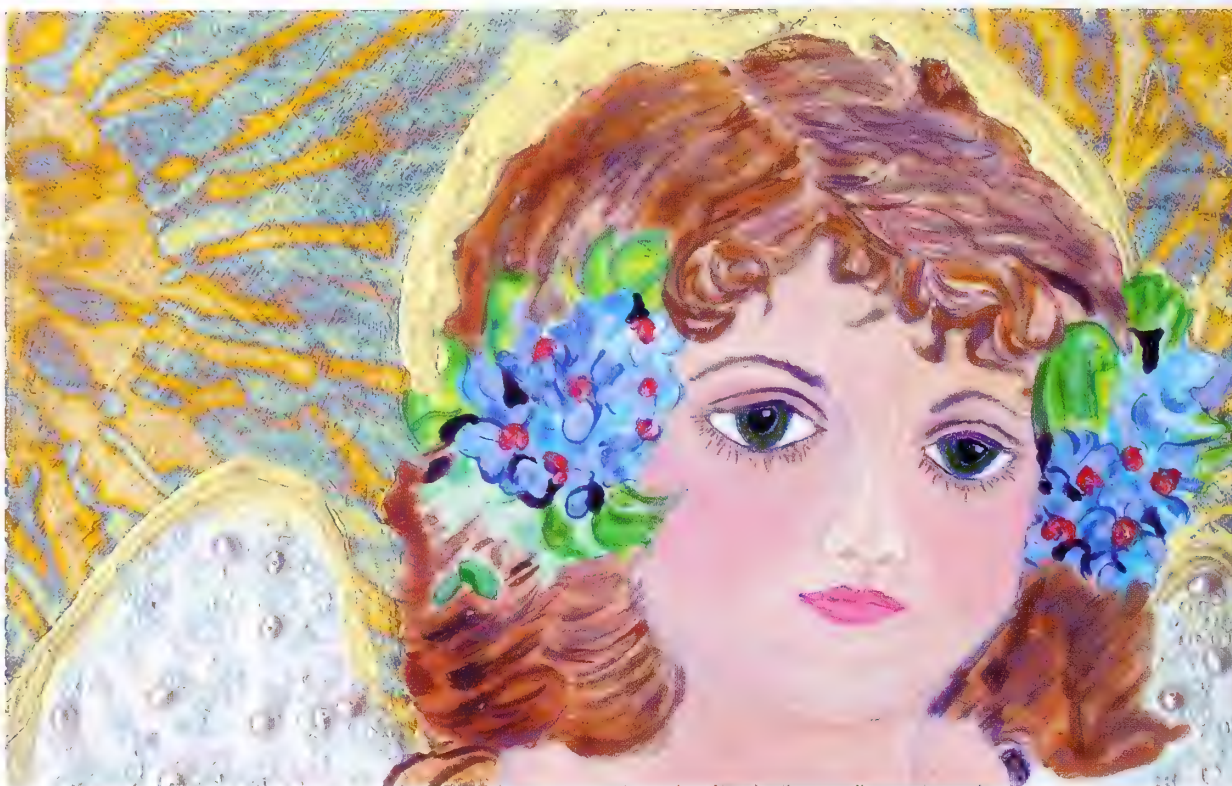
Madonna and Child convey a profound unconditional love. Her eyes seem to look deeply into the essence of whatever is before her. To be truly seen and loved for who I am, that is what I long for.

Anonymous

ANGEL IMAGES

Angel images are all around. I prefer the dignified calm of those of the late Middle Ages or early Renaissance. Their regal, understated beauty exudes peace and compassion. When everything seems so loud, frantic and fast, I look for quiet, gentleness and a sense of the eternal.

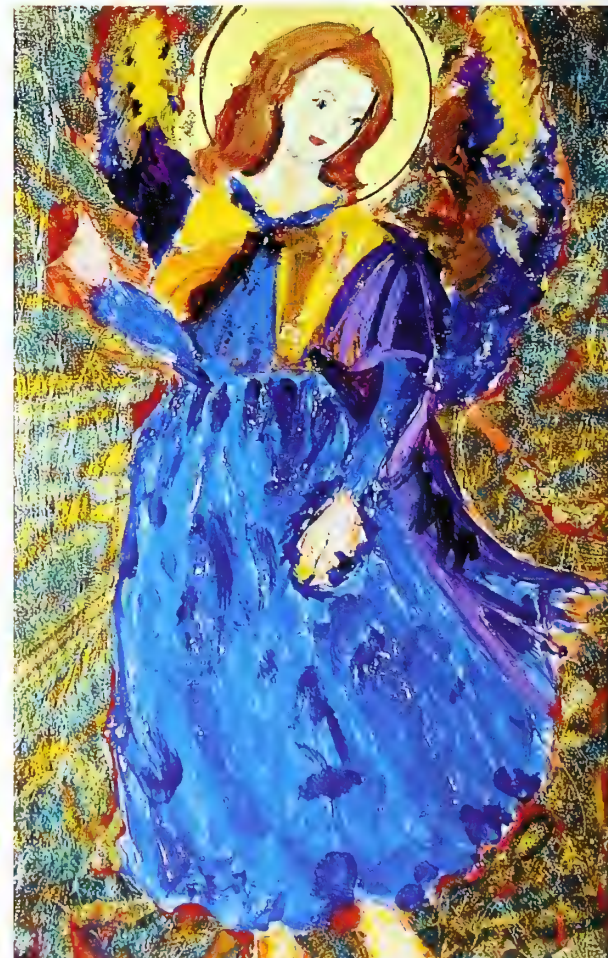
Bella



PRAYING HANDS ANGEL

It gave me an extraordinary warm tingling feeling to paint my angel. I picked the praying hands angel, as I have been feeling that my prayers have not been going anywhere. So I am feeling that my painted praying angel will give me some help to carry my prayers to the Lord. I have now a good feeling about that. I also loved creating my own favourite colouring in the gown; my feelings seemed to express themselves with mixing colours.

Erika



Angel by Heather

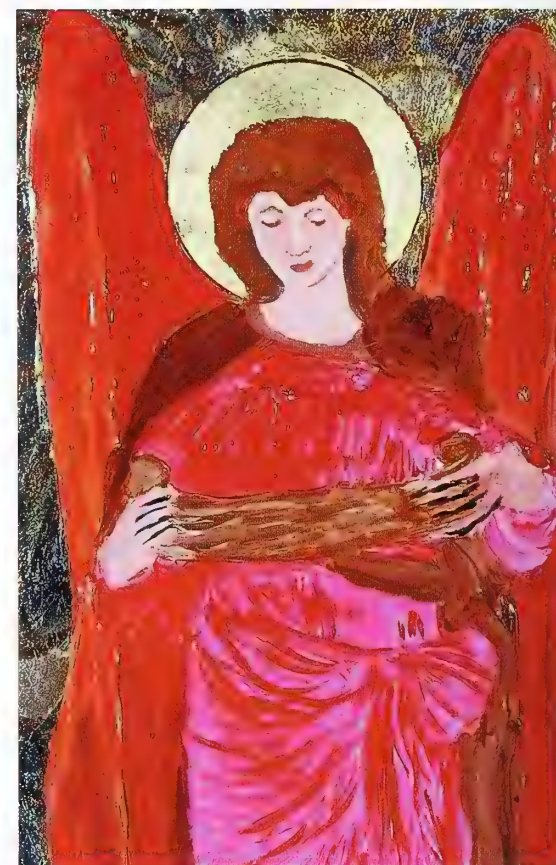




Angel by Judy



Angel by Nibal



Angel by Helen

IMPERFECT ANGELS

Layer upon layer. Too dark, lighten up! At a distance, beautiful; up close, you can see the imperfections. Imperfections: she's not perfect, I'm not perfect. I have no eyebrows, no eyelashes, my cheeks are chubbier, and my skin is dry and unfamiliar to me. My face does not look like mine.

My body aches in different spots. But from a distance I look normal, just like my angel.

In a few weeks my angel will look better, she will have more layers. She will have more colour and realism to her. In a few more weeks my body will change. I will have more colour. No more chemo, maybe I will start to become me again, little by little.

Jessica

*At a distance, beautiful;
up close, you can see the imperfections.*



BLUE ANGEL

I chose this angel on my own. The blue colours are very powerful. When we began today with a meditation, my image of healing light was blue. My angel floats with the stars in her sheer elegance, and I feel a sense of calmness and beauty.

Lora





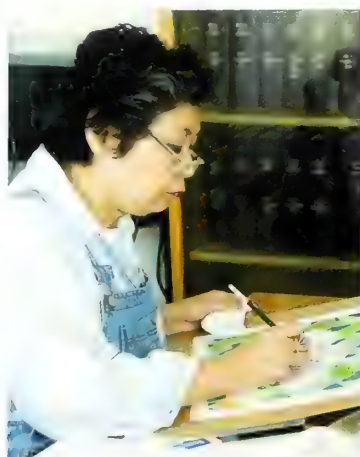
UNFINISHED ANGEL

When I look at my angel, she reflects calm, serenity and a quality of inner peace. I hope for this! She doesn't look quite finished – just as I am discovering about myself. I would have liked to spend more time on applying more layers of paint – just as I need time to heal and discover my authentic self.

Norma

Watercolour

Watercolour is a spontaneous, absorbing medium. While it is a beautiful art form, it can be unforgiving. Each brush stroke reflects the painter's innermost feelings. The mark may be sensitive, bold or tentative, depending on what the painter wants to portray. The initial and succeeding marks or strokes on the paper stay and show through each layer. It takes great courage to make a mark, live with the mark and ultimately share it to the delight and sometimes the critique of others.



Watercolour by Hyoko



Watercolour by Esther



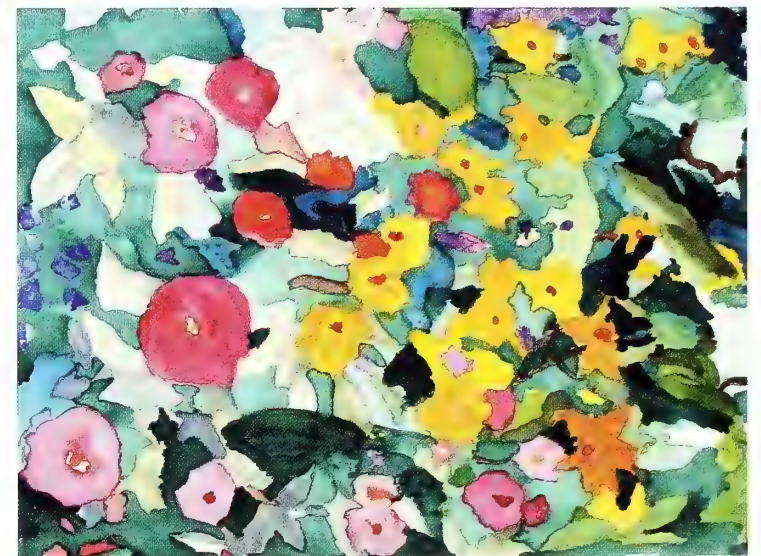
OUTSIDE THE LINES

I've always been good at colouring between the lines in art. I suppose I live my life the same way. It makes it easier to get through each day.

In planning the design of my watercolour painting, I drew flowers in pencil. The plan was to paint within the lines. When it became time to paint, I found that I was having a hard time keeping the paint within the lines. Because of this I decided to paint freehand. It worked – my painting pleases me.

This makes me wonder. If I can learn to live my life without lines/ boundaries, I may not have such a hard time coping when things happen outside the normal, like cancer.

Wendy



*From my life
comes beauty.*

Clematis Climbing by Rondo



CREATE YOUR OWN COLOURS

Just walking in the river valley and seeing the colours, I realized all of the shades for which there are no names. Painting has made me realize how wonderful it is to create your own colours. There is a feeling of power in that; at the same time it feels childlike. The feeling of squishing a tube of emerald and cyan together and making your own unique shade is freeing.

Workshop Participant



PENCIL CRAYON

Coloured pencils have been in use since the early 1900s, but it wasn't until the 1960s that they were more widely distributed as an art medium. Today it is possible to purchase a selection of pencil crayons of every imaginable colour. What a delight to go into an art store and look at exotic shades with names like magenta, chartreuse, icy blue or mango to name a few, and then make your choice of individual pencils or a

whole box. The basic materials we use include sets of 120 PRISMACOLOR pencils, colourless blenders, and medium-grained paper. Numerous books in art stores and libraries explore the basic techniques of coloured pencils and there are classes that also teach this art form.

If you try this technique, you may find yourself becoming reacquainted with the joy you experienced as a child, opening a new box of crayons and colouring to your heart's content. There is something comforting and relaxing about seeing colour spread across the page, filling an empty space. In that quiet time, we slow down and have time to just be with our thoughts.

SHADES OF YELLOW AND ORANGE

When I began to colour, I was upset. My eleven-year-old daughter and I had just had an argument. This was consuming my thoughts and feelings. As I coloured, beautiful shades of yellow and orange merged on my paper and with this came many thoughts about why my daughter and I were clashing. We are so close. Colouring initially seemed a rather silly thing to do at my age, but it was calming and I was aware of my thoughts.

In a flash of insight, I realized what was going on with my daughter. I was angry with her because she was not growing up fast enough. She still needed me too much and I was afraid she wouldn't be able to take care of herself if anything happened to me. The connection that I wasn't allowing her to be a little girl, and that she needed to be a child right now, was made in the midst of colouring this little bird. Once I understood and acknowledged what was happening, I knew I could find a way through it. I had to take a step back and trust that my daughter would grow up when she needed to.



I talked with my daughter and explained that I was frightened and that my fear was causing me to be irritable with her. Over the next few days I decided to discuss my concerns with the vice-principal of my daughter's school. In the conversation she asked what she could do to help us. I was open to any help. She introduced me to a wonderful teacher who knew my daughter and was willing to look out for her, providing extra support. Over time she has become a phenomenal support and suddenly I am finding that I can breathe again!

Brenda

PASTELS

Quality papers and an assortment of oil pastels are needed for this art form. The images on these pages are just a few of the many that came from individuals who had never used pastels before, and yet the images and writing richly reflect what was going on for each person at that time. A remarkable resource, our imagination is a rich and powerful tool. It can help us in understanding our situation whatever it may be, or it can lead us to find innovative ways to solve problems.



PUFF, MY "HEALING DRAGON"

When I was first diagnosed, I could feel my strength and control quickly slip away. Luckily, during the beginning phases of treatment I was introduced to the technique of using creativity to help me cope with these feelings. I created this pastel drawing of a dragon. The combination of blue pastels reflects a calming influence, like the sky or sea. It is the dragon that speaks to my experience with cancer. It reflects my need to be assertive in my own healing process. Even though I have to deal with a serious illness, I am coming to feel more powerful, just like the dragon. I'm moving forward, perhaps cautiously, but moving forward strong and proud. My dragon reminds me of my inner strength.

Mary Clare



Watching children drawing or colouring intently with a new set of crayons or building sandcastles on a beach, one remembers the pure delight in creating with even the simplest of materials. It costs very little and yet there is a feeling of richness to the experience. Perhaps young artists caught up in the creative energy of the moment realize instinctively that they are feeding their soul.

Allie

As adults we need to reconnect with the joy we once felt in such simple activities. Creativity was crucial to our growth and development then. Now it can feed our souls today.



A SPECIAL STAR TO HELP ME HEAL

A special star was sent out just to help heal me. The vibrantly coloured rays of light were able to penetrate my whole being, my mind, body and spirit. The light was a "holy light." This light flashed through my body casting out disease, sadness and depression, replacing it with beautiful colour. There was so much light being sent that I felt I was able to actually "store" it for future use. There was also the feeling of being able to send it out to share with others. I see a divinity sending me love and light to keep me safe and strong.

As I look to the future, I feel freer. I feel better able to handle my cancer and the worries that go with it. I don't feel as depressed, and I am more at one with nature. I realize that love of family and friends, mankind and nature is really all that is important. My future shows one breast but it also depicts my soul and heart, which is really like finding my self.

Marie



SPIRAL OF ENERGY

While I was preparing for radiation treatments, this coil image was present. I drew myself in New Zealand, in an outdoor shower amid beautiful, exotic foliage. That was my "healing place." In an earlier drawing I had also placed coils of spiralling energy. In this drawing I deliberately put them in first. One came from the Sun. In the bottom left corner a tree is rooted with the spiral of energy going right into the root of the tree. In this way the tree is connected directly to energy. I remember drawing a tree in our support group, but "my tree" at the time didn't have roots. I didn't notice that until now, but that fits, because at the time I was diagnosed with breast cancer I certainly didn't feel rooted to anything. In fact, I felt like a strong gust of wind could just knock me right over!

The tree here has a strong and sturdy trunk, the roots extending deep into the ground. Part of the "doodling" in my picture was a big round circle. When I first looked at my picture after it was done, I thought the circle represented my breast. This image is full of life and energy. This circle is full of life, too – it's healthy. Interesting

to me that I have placed a breast in my future. My experience with breast cancer is still significant. I've chosen not to close this door in my life. Some choose to move on and in moving on, forget what happened. Others, like me, choose to deliberately recognize that cancer was a part of my life. This image has ongoing significance. It is a symbol of the growing that I have done and the deep friendships I have made. This all stems from remembering and acknowledging, in a positive way, what I have experienced through cancer treatment.

Jane



HEALING JOURNEY

This picture represents an important stage in my healing journey. I am the tree, upright and centred and I am drawing strength and healing energy from my guardian angel.

In my mind the angel is my mother, who died from breast cancer a year and a half before I was diagnosed with the same disease. I draw strength from her memory and her experience with the disease.

As I heal I become stronger and healthier than before. This is reflected in the new shoots springing out from the tree. When I have healing thoughts, I usually think of my mother. While her memory gives me strength, it also saddens me because I feel her death was needlessly lonely and frightening. She chose not to share her condition with her family and friends or her doctor. She was not diagnosed with her cancer until three weeks before her death, although she was very aware of her condition.

I think she was trying to protect her loved ones from the disease; however, the stress of keeping her fears to herself just seemed to hasten the end. I can't understand why she did what she did. Why didn't she seek treatment? I ask myself if perhaps I did or said something that made my mother feel that she could not confide in me.

After reflecting on the picture, I truly felt I didn't understand its significance. Something about the picture nagged me. While discussing it, I suddenly realized I still harboured anger, hurt and guilt toward my mother. I felt betrayed by her decision to exclude me in her very strongest time of need. But I realized that I had to let go of these emotions if I was going to heal myself.

I would never fully understand my mother's rationale, but it was not important for me to understand it any more. I came to a place of acceptance.

I look at the picture now and I see the energy flowing in two directions. I see the red representing the release of my anger while love and forgiveness are flowing inward. I am at peace with myself and with my mother.

Marie



WE ARE ALL JOINED

As I drew, I recognized a communion with others. We are all joined spiritually, everything, including people, animals and nature. As I drew, I felt warmth, insight and a feeling of having a brief glimpse of enlightenment.

This image reflects the opening of my self to others. I am less guarded and concerned with appearances. This is me. I am spiritual and purposeful, and I feel a Divine oneness. I am now taking the opportunity to live life to the fullest. I have adjusted my approach to how I view life by participating more fully and not being afraid to make choices.

Helen



Fibreglass breastplate painted by Zelda

THE LANGUAGE OF HEALING

The images we create speak to us in clear messages. They are a powerful means of communication and can provide us with insights to better understand ourselves. Even the simplest of images can offer us clues as to how we might clarify a problem so that we can identify helpful resolutions for the challenges we face.

A little over fourteen years ago, a young woman was referred to me by her oncologist because she was declining radiation treatment for breast cancer. Barbara experienced panic attacks and had convinced herself that she “just couldn’t do it.” Radiation treatment has changed significantly since then, but at that time Barbara was to have twenty-five treatments for which she would be fitted with a fibreglass mould. (Today moulds are rarely used; in their place, small tattoo markings, specialized imaging and better immobilization methods help expertly position patients.) After a simulation of the treatment, she made her way into the treatment room.

Imagine what this experience might have been like for Barbara. Initially even the machinery itself can seem overwhelming. And while the radiation therapists are exquisitely trained and compassionate, after positioning you for treatment they vacate the room! The heavy door closes, seemingly isolating you from the technicians, who watch from another area. In moments like these we can feel vulnerable, scared and alone. In Barbara’s case, panic set in.

As we discussed Barbara’s experience, I asked if she could draw a picture of how she saw herself receiving the radiation treatment. Her picture said a thousand words! What began as a simple stick drawing ultimately provided a clue and a solution to her dilemma around treatment. We noticed that the figure in her picture was all blue, literally chilled with fear – “scared stiff” were Barbara’s words. The drawing captured her sense of powerlessness, as though she felt stripped to the core. Her knees looked as though they were trembling and would actually buckle. Her quivering mouth revealed the depth of hesitation she was feeling about the treatments. The four HUGE bolts in her drawing illustrated the panic she felt at being bolted to the treatment table.

Along with the drawing we began to explore what she was telling herself about the treatment. By gradually learning to re-frame her inner dialogue, Barbara was able to come to a logical and more helpful way of thinking about her treatment.

Barbara came to realize that she could sit up whenever she needed, even though this would not be the most efficient use of treatment time. Just knowing this helped. We talked about how the shield and the bolts were designed to position her body to best focus the treatment. Barbara learned to become more aware of her negative self-talk and the unhelpful beliefs she had about her treatment.

The second and third images, drawn a week apart, show that Barbara experienced a definite shift in her thoughts and feelings about radiation treatment. The bolts are smaller and the healing radiates from her. She completed the treatment and now, almost fifteen years later, she is doing well.

M.J.H.

Radiation Treatment



Image 3

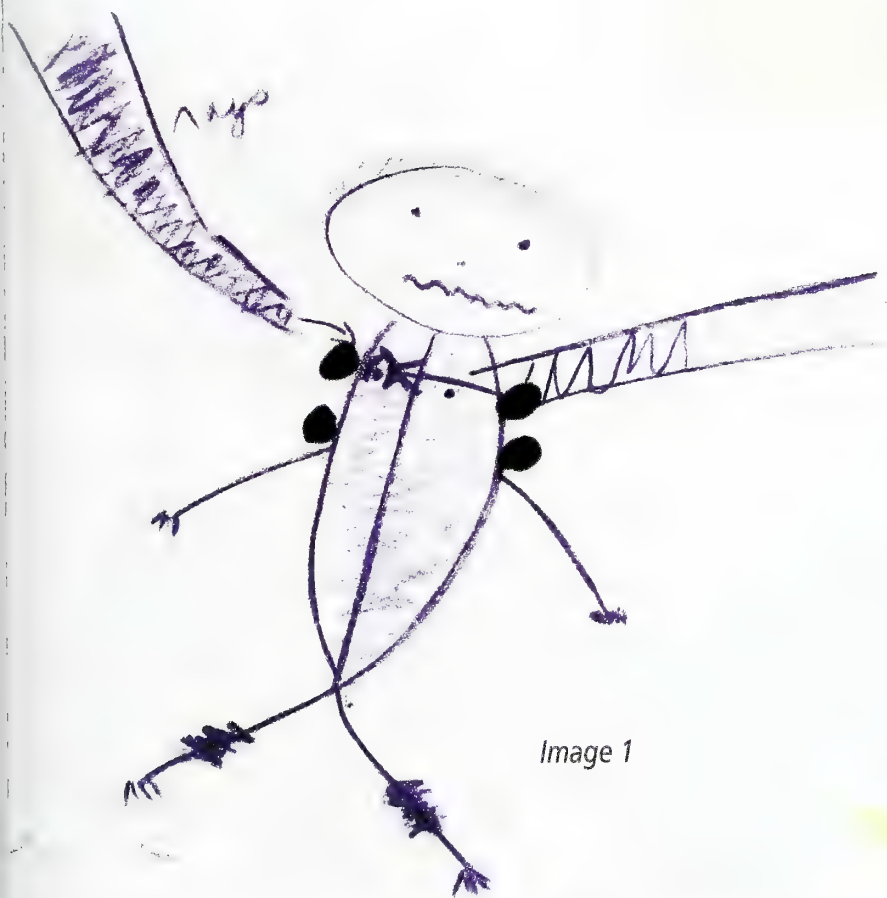
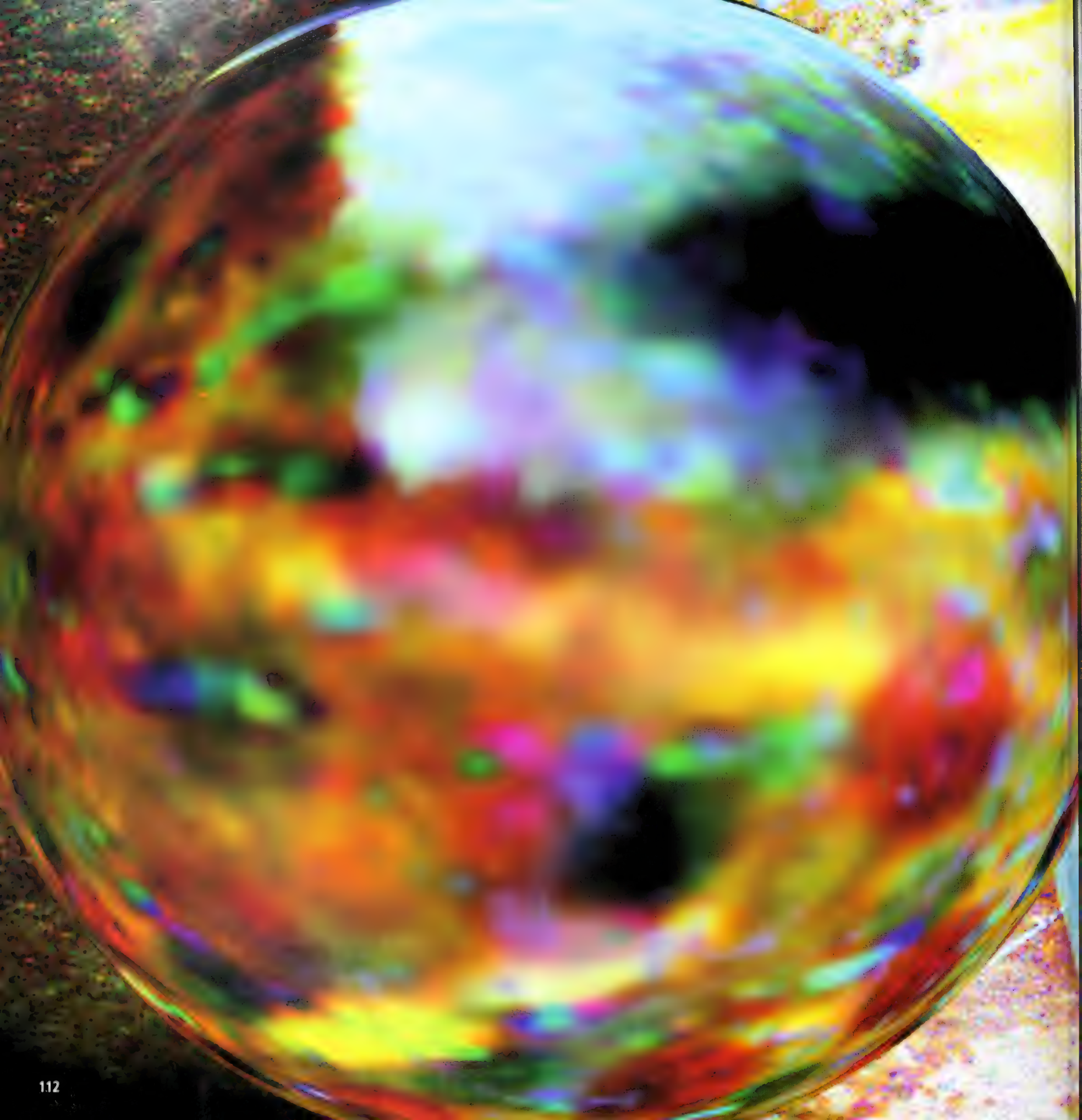


Image 1



Image 2

Radiation Station
2000-17-10





COLOURFUL LANDSCAPES OF CHAOS AND ORDER

My paintings are worlds, they are globes, they are fragments of a new universe that I'm trying to create, a new life after cancer. If I hadn't created these colourful landscapes of Chaos and Order, I wouldn't have been able to get to the next place in my healing, moving from strength to strength.

When I was diagnosed with cancer, my focus was fear – not knowing whether I would be around for my three boys: Emerson, Bennett and Cooper. My focus wasn't on art. But through Arts in Medicine I have made the connection with really important things. Even the small things you connect with at the end of the day make the biggest difference. Art allows you to start making that connection.

Despite all the care we get, the comfort from friends and family and doctors, cancer patients sometimes feel isolated and completely disconnected. Creativity opens up new pathways to connection. When I create, I make something I can share with you, and that has the benefit of making two people understand what's going on. It's like laughter. You hear someone laughing and you immediately have a smile on your face. It makes you feel good, it releases chemicals and it's something that's shared. I think creativity is much like that.

Passion is contagious. Creativity is contagious. It is more than just medicine for the one person; art is medicine for everyone.

Steven Csorba

Images on these two pages used with permission

Heavy art paper, pencils, and good acrylic paints are the materials needed for this art form. Initially the image reflecting a person's story was drawn on sketching paper, and then transferred to the proper art paper before preparing to paint.

The vibrancy of colours and the intricate details in each work illustrate the splendour of our imagination. There is enjoyment in seeing how the various components in each person's story come together to make a whole image. It is almost like a puzzle wherein the diminutive aspects of the story find their perfect place, thereby giving those who view each piece the "whole picture."

NAVIGATING IN THE PSYCHIC SEA

When I began drawing, it was with intention to portray a breast. After all, it was breast cancer that brought me here. But the drawing took on a life of its own as it developed into a face within my lopsided heart.

Each time I've looked at this piece of art, new emotions have been awakened and different interpretations have presented themselves. I was even motivated to head off to the library to seek information about universal symbols. I found that I would need to devote a whole lifetime of study to do any justice to unravel the mysteries of this very complex field.

The introspective journey through art has ultimately been liberating. It has released me from the bonds of worrying whether I was doing the project the "right" way.

Cancer in my life has been an unexpected and, at first, unappreciated gift that I have embraced with the hope that its lesson about life can make me stronger, self-confident, and a worthy human being. Daniel Defoe wrote that "The soul is placed in the body like a rough diamond and must be polished, or the lustre will never appear." Cancer has made me face the need to burnish my soul.

Florence





HAIR

Despite being diagnosed with breast cancer and having gone through four surgeries within two months, it was the loss of my hair that overwhelmed me the most!

These two hair paintings, "Overwhelmed" and "All Gone," depict my internal, emotional and spiritual journey as my thick, long, dark chestnut brown hair fell away from my scalp onto my shoulders, nestled on my pillow and clogged the shower drain!

Outwardly, I was apparently taking it all in my stride with a good stiff upper lip inherited from my English forebears. Inwardly, my emotional and psychological systems were on overload.

Even though neither one provides a realistic image of my photographic likeness, each artwork presents what I was experiencing internally between the first two chemotherapy sessions. Each visual story begins with three main symbolic images. They were the nucleus that led to the finished story.

With this approach, it is essential for the artist to keep an open mind and a loose hand on the pencil in order to easily "receive" a sense of messages and images that will come through from deep inside. These images will be intertwined around the more dominant shapes that are consciously selected in the beginning. The process of laying down the image in pencil and/or black marker first is like opening a door to an internal library. There on the shelf lies a beautifully bound visual biography that contains all the missing links between events and people in your life (past and present). As the painting unfolds, you will be reproducing an image from one of these internal pages. Hopefully, the connections will help you make sense of the disease and commence the healing process.

Overwhelmed

The three main symbols evident in "Overwhelmed" are the aloof, detached-looking face, the angry, shark-like fish and the lymph nodes. Since I am primarily a textile artist and sculptor, it is not surprising that I tried to prevent my hair from falling out by encasing my skull with layers and layers of brightly coloured, multicultural fabric representative of distant lands.

The two fish forming the outer folds possibly refer to my spiritual request for God to help me through this journey. Somehow, I expected my God to erase my anguish by securing the hair onto my head. But, another, angry shark-like fish has escaped from beneath the fabric shroud and is headed right for my healthy lymph nodes.

Clearly, my soul was/is in great turmoil as I questioned my female identity and chances of survival. This painting is meant to attract the viewer's attention without allowing him/her to penetrate the humanity beneath the veils of patterned hues.

ALL GONE

My hair fell out quickly once it started. For me, the three main symbols are the boomerang, the headpiece and the spinal chord/neck area. In this abstracted portrait, the head is draped in a bird image that represents a china parrot that my grandfather had given to my family decades ago. As a young child, I detested this ornamental creature with the garish colours for disturbing the otherwise tranquil colour scheme of the dining room. Furthermore, it was situated directly over my head according to the seating arrangement in our family. Can you imagine my shock at seeing this image surface in my visual story about hair loss?

The neck is represented as a type of vertebrae that refers to my twisted spinal cord. All my life I have dressed to camouflage this physical deformity. Why am I now giving it a prominent position along with the cancer? Its segmented appearance indicates how I approach difficult situations, in small steps designed to keep me moving along unknown paths that lead in many different directions.

The bird images around the shoulder areas are guardians, defenders of the female's right to nurture and allure. However, one angry green fish has escaped from beneath the blue extremities of the pink and yellow bird forming the left shoulder. He's headed for the lymph nodes floating beside the neck. The city referenced in the apple in the bottom right is meant to show how world issues such as starvation and lack of education become less important for those people who find themselves overwhelmed by personal traumas. The earrings are large and noticeable because they are my favourite piece of jewellery. Here, they are meant to reaffirm the importance of taking the time to listen to our own inner voice.

The boomerang-like symbol in the top right corner expresses my longing to overcome this disease and return to some level of personal normalcy. The arms of the boomerang spread out to protect the head, as this is where I feel most vulnerable now that my hair is gone. Being an asthmatic, I always regarded my hair as a blanket of concealment, offering a shelter of protection that afforded me the courage to interact with the world around me. Losing my hair through cancer has left me with no place to hide. The additional loss of eyebrows and eyelashes accentuate the challenge to find and redefine myself within a new and ever-changing state of reality.

The stories and images on these two pages are by Brenda Rowe-Bartlett, a professional artist and an Arts in Medicine facilitator.





LIFE

This is about the ups and downs of life; sometimes it's choppy, sometimes smooth. The events of the last three years have left me feeling boxed in, having no control, feeling unsettled and wondering "what next?".

It's about dark skies and lightning coming out of nowhere, bringing on stormy and rougher times.

It's about lulls before the storms. In the midst of this turmoil, good things happen: new beginnings, new and renewed friendships, new experiences, happiness and support from family and friends. My two nieces born in the last fifteen months are little sweethearts who have given me much joy. Warm, sunny days bring with them comfort and peacefulness.

It's about persevering through good and bad. Like the lone tree, at times I felt alone. It stands alone, it rests during the winter, then comes to life in spring, bringing pleasure to us during the summer and showing its vibrant side in the fall. It lives through drought and floods, extreme cold and hot. It's strong, so am I. It perseveres, so do I.

Sharon



FOCUS

The experience of having cancer quietly, profoundly altered my daily life. The important things in life came into sharp, vivid focus: my family, friends and people who come and go in my life. No property, job or outward accomplishments matter as much.

My painting helped me. I realized that I am a happier person than I was before. Now I feel the warmth of my two children. I appreciate the steadiness and good humour of my husband (the bear/beaver). I know that they survived and healed along with me. I love the outdoors and the changes the days and seasons bring. Time is ever present, pulling me in several directions. Any unforeseen event (a close brush with lightning that I had one day in our strawberry patch) can end a life in an instant.

I am blessed with the company of people who typify the warmth of the human spirit. I knew this only in an offhand, distant way before encountering cancer. I had an odd sense of good fortune at having this knowledge brought sharply to the fore as I go about my daily life. Painting my story in the company of fellow cancer survivors affirmed my optimism and gave me fresh appreciation for life.

Jennifer



THE PROTECTOR

For me, this is healing art, definitely not a work of art. I do not draw, I do not paint, but my self-portrait speaks from my soul, from a place that I do not easily share with others. This is my story.

I am a mother, "The Protector." I have a gene – BRCA1 – that I carry with me on my road of life. I do not want it. It feels chained to me and is represented by the dark chains that are attached to the road of my life journey. Just as my mother could not protect me from this gene, I cannot protect my daughters. But I want to...and I try.

My daughters are represented as babies at my breast, so innocent and vulnerable. The halos around their heads are my breasts. Six months ago I had a prophylactic double mastectomy with reconstruction. Are reconstructed breasts still breasts? I'm not sure of that. My arms are covered in muscles. I will do anything to protect my girls from harm. I am a warrior and protector. My face and arms show the armour and war paint. In my dream I wear a crown of jewels and gems. I'm not sure why, but I do and so I include this in my picture.

My ovaries and uterus are shaped as a butterfly. The shape is something that came from my subconscious, while doing my healing art. My ovaries and uterus are beautiful, with flames of passion. Soon they will be gone, too. Another surgery to ensure I remain healthy, to ensure the role of the protector. This part of my portrait is a tribute to them and the role they have played in my life. They enabled me to be a mother, the most important role in my life.

Surrounding me is my mother: she is my protector. She battled against breast cancer in her 30s, 40s; her final battle was last year. Her whole life she showed me her inner strength and courage, through her love for others. Now, in death, she comes to me in sunrises and raindrops, leaves and birds, faith and prayer. She continues to surround me with her love. The circle continues.

Fran



THE CAREGIVER'S SONG

Paintbrush is a drumstick
 Marking inner sounds.
 Hand drum, a round canvas,
 Freeing hidden stories.
 Colours, hues, intensities,
 Reflected from within.
 Lines, rhymes, symbols
 Repetitive sounds, begin.
 Paint or drum a private story
 Celebrate the moment.
 Drum and brush with
 soft smooth strokes
 Let it go in fury.
 Backgrounds muted and all the same
 With Earth heart's constant beat.
 The subject is the melody
 Expressing all it can.
 Burning pain from muskrat's teeth
 Somewhere in the night.
 A laughing kiss, grandfather Sun
 On Baby's shoulder, brown.
 The ragged sound of Father's breath
 Accompanies his sleep.
 Fatigue distorts Mom's gentle ways
 Replacing it with grief
 Patterns, contrasts, values.
 The sacredness within.
 A holy time for all to share
 In voices strong and true.

Jackie

THE JOURNEY

The dominant symbols are the lymph nodes, orange wings and the masked face. There is much confusion, it's busy, asymmetrical and all over the place. The colours are bold.

The lymph nodes and swollen neck show my cancer. I worry about the degree to which the disease has invaded my body; I feel it's a wakeup call. My body is not happy with how things have been and it's crying out for re-evaluation.

The vertebrae show strength and support, which is all around me. I feel I want to give others the support, as well. My niece Lisa passed away from cancer. Her favourite colour was orange. She inspires me to be positive and giving. She is my orange angel.

I'm not always willing to reveal information, which makes it difficult for others to help. That is why there are no ears, yet the eyes are very large and take in everything around me. I am perceptive, but sometimes I make it difficult for others to get to know me. The butterfly and orange wings show that I am constantly on the fly. My hair loss was disturbing. Once the hair was gone, it was very freeing. The many different colours represent the many hats and bandanas that became part of my wardrobe. However, I felt most comfortable going without a head covering.

My biggest confidante and support has been my husband, who is represented by the heart. He gives me stability and is central to my being. The black cat is Ashley, who gives comfort and unconditional love. I had a vivid dream about a bald eagle and immediately the next day saw one. I'm not sure yet what this represents but it could be my guardian, who watches over me.

The mountain in the background represents my tendency to take physical risks. The sun peeking up over the mountain is a request for renewal. It's a reminder that there will be better days ahead. Even though it's not dominant, there is a plea for help from the light above.

An apple represents the teacher in me. It covers a large portion of my face because it has consumed my life for so long. I love the profession, but I have lost my "life." We have little choice about what we are given, with a class or a disease. Apples also represent keeping well – an apple a day keeps the doctor away. This needs to become a priority.



Written Expression

Paper, pens or pencils, a journal or a computer are the only resources needed for written expressions. We encourage people to write about their creative experience. Typically, we spend the last thirty minutes of each class writing in our journals. This length of time allows participants to go deeper into the experience and find new ways to express themselves; to take time to fully explore their extensive and fascinating inner world. The words that come forth are often healing words, a balm to the soul. They can give us further understanding of our life experiences.

Sometimes written expressions take the form of prose or stream of consciousness writing. They can find their form in poetry. Within the pages of this book, adults and children alike have expressed their thoughts and feelings in a variety of ways. Initially, people are hesitant to write, finding it hard to put their feelings on paper. Once they begin, they find that it is a wonderful extension of the creative process. We also offer Arts in Medicine workshops that focus on writing as the primary form of artistic expression. In these classes, stories and poems as well as journals give voice to a wide range of experiences, emotions and insights.



THE RIDE

The Ride is like a roller coaster

D o w n u n d
a p r o u n d

Unpredictable

Like the emotions it evokes

It's big ~

Life intensified

To grow

More determined, confident ~ stronger

In myself

My faith

Healing.

Deb



Tile by Michele



Tile by Premee

A MINOR PROCEDURE

"Relax,
Don't worry,
Please sign this Release,
You could die or be damaged,
It's just a small chance –
A MINOR procedure,"
They say in a trance.
No eye contact,
A hand on the door,
Your minute is up –
"Oh yes, you may be a bit sore."
But, no time for questions,
Just sign and be good –
A MINOR procedure,
"Now relax, yes, you should."
A cut in your tummy,
A needle in the spine,
A tube in your groin,
"Don't worry, you're fine!"
Injections of dye,
"Hold your breath, and now breathe,"
A drain in your chest –
"Now wait," and "No, you can't leave."
"It's not quite enough,
We need a bit more."
A MINOR procedure?
I've heard that before!!

Fawna

AMAZING PEACE

I believe that our experiences and thoughts help make us who we are. Life is a time when we are given the chance to experience as much as we can, to explore, accept and understand things. It is a chance to face our soul and let it become what it aspires to be. All of our experiences and thoughts help form this beautiful being and my experiences with cancer are now a key component to who I am. It has given me a side that no one could ever extract from the chemistry I have become. My time in therapy placed me in a world unrecognizable, almost incomprehensible, to the

outside world. It was a timeless moment of silence, of patience, of healing and of prayer. In reflection, I remember a time of amazing peace. And this is what I take with me on the rest of my journey in life.

Csilla



Tile by Carol

MY MOTHER, MY HERO

When I was a young girl, my mother was my hero. I would dream that I would grow up to be just like her – strong, level-headed, and loving. When we were small, Mom would pack a lunch and my sister and I would walk to the lake. We would feed the ducks, eat sandwiches and cookies, and just enjoy the weeks of summer. I truly believed that nothing would ever happen to Mom.

In eighth grade, my life flipped upside down. Mom was diagnosed with breast cancer. At first there was disbelief. Then came shock, as the startling news began to sink in. Fear and worry ran through my body. For a brief moment, I felt as though my heart had stopped beating.

The days that followed were extremely tense. In complete silence, we watched our Mom prepare her overnight bag as she meticulously packed each item of clothing. We stood by quietly. The next day at school, I was completely distracted by thoughts of Mom. Will she be okay? Will she be the same person?

The surgery went well and the next day when we visited Mom I found myself not wanting to leave her all by herself. In that instant, I remembered all the times Mom was there for me throughout my life. In that moment, I understood I needed to be there for her and give back in some way. I have learned to treasure every day and not take anything for granted.

Rosalinda

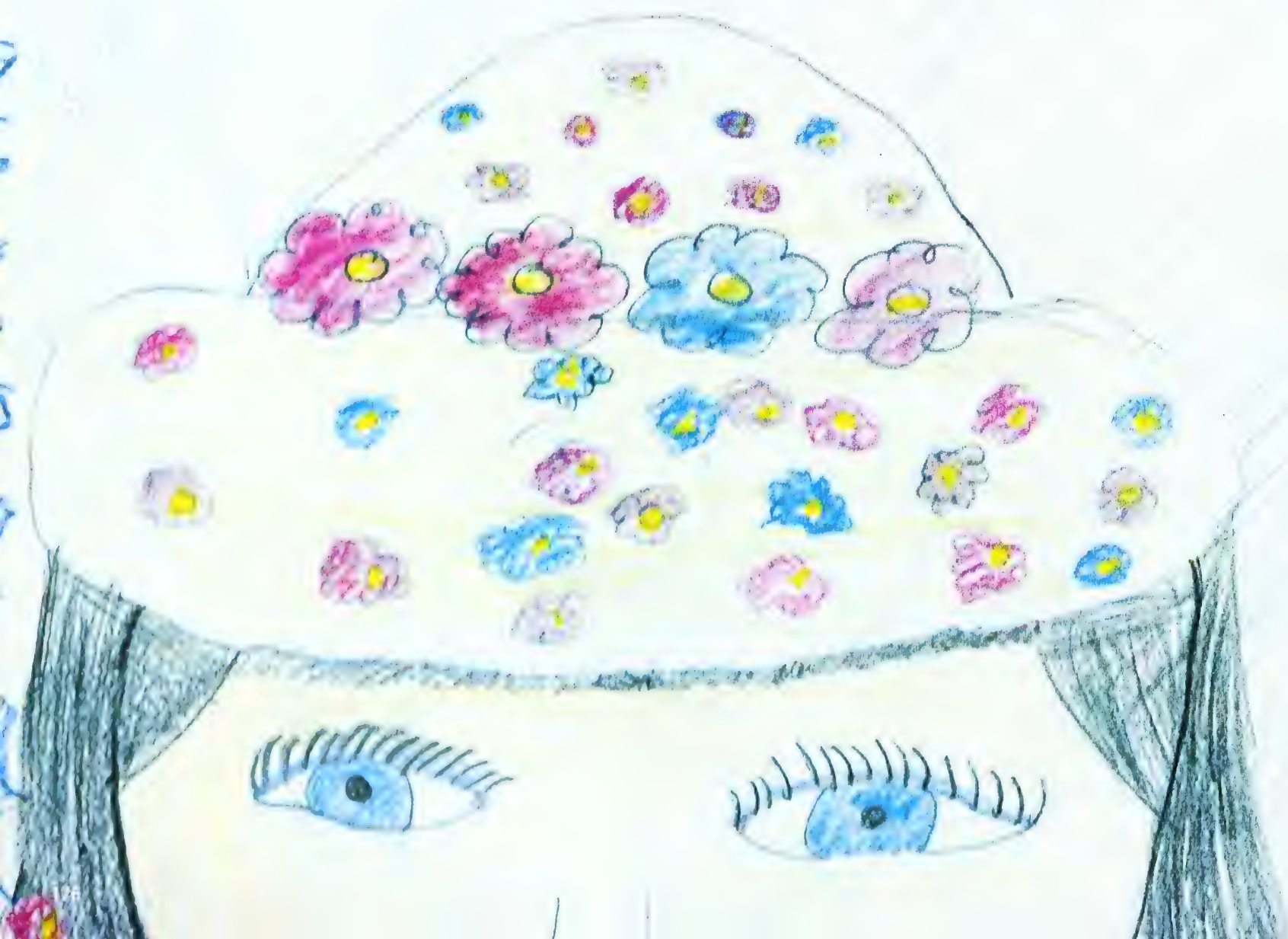


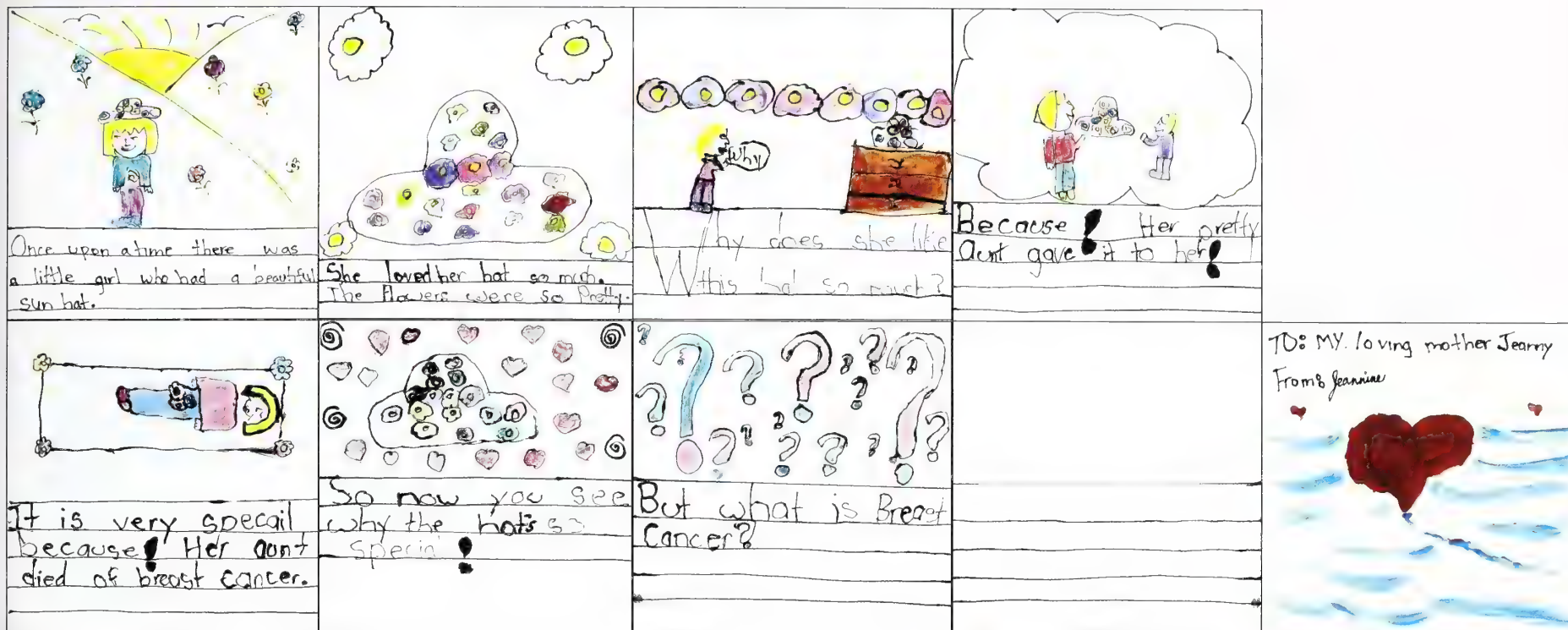
I SEE YOU

I see you
In all unbalanced Beauty,
Standing
Between heaven and earth
To see
Broad and deep,
To see
Life, here,
So clearly:
See what you have to give,
To sacrifice,
A chunk of your womanhood
To gain
An understanding
Of a full person;
To bridge
Meaninglessness to
Significance;
To discover
Your innocence
Wisdom
And Character.
I see you
In all badged magnificence
Having turned
Pain
Into a lesson;
Suffering
Into a test;
Fear
Into hope
Boundless.
Then
To return
Your perfect garden
To shine
Forever.

Maggie

The sun hat





JEANNINE'S STORY BOOK

When I was diagnosed with breast cancer I was concerned about losing my hair. Even though I never wear hats, I thought I would buy one just in case I needed it. During this time, my daughter Jeannine went from an "A" to a "C" student. The school recommended a specialist to talk with her, but her teacher said the only problem with Jeannine was that she was worried about her mom.

After my treatment was over, I was cleaning out the closet and found the hat. I gave it to Jeannine for "dress-up," telling her that I no longer needed it since I was finished treatment and I wouldn't be losing my hair. Jeannine's friend Kathleen was visiting that day so they decided to make me this little book. I noticed right away that in the story it was not I, her mother, who had given the hat to the little girl. It was a pretty Aunt who had died of breast cancer.

I showed the little book to Dr. Hundleby and she asked if I thought Jeannine would like to paint her story as a Tile Tale – perhaps it could help other parents understand some of the concerns their children may be experiencing. However, it was five months before Jeannine was actually able to schedule the painting of her series of tiles.

When she finished painting I looked at the tiles to make sure all of the pages were complete. I put the two cover pages side by side, and noticed that there was a difference in the pictures of the "Aunt" in the sun hat. In the original cover, only a small portion of the face was showing. It was as though Jeannine's fear that I, her mother, would not survive was being expressed right up front. On the more recent cover, however, much more of the face was showing, and the mouth was drawn with a smile. Healing had obviously taken place over the five-month time span.

Seven years later, both Jeannine and I are doing well. Jeannine has completed high school and is preparing for university, to become a psychologist.

Jeanny



A VERY HARD TIME

We the Algars were going through a very, very tough time when the one we loved very much got Breast Cancer. This very, very brave lady is our MOM. Nobody asked for it but it is just one of those things that no one expects it could happen to them, but it happened to us.

Now this is one of the worst things that could happen to a family. I mean, you know your mother is up in the hospital going through unbearable pain and you know it, but can't do anything about it but go to visit her every second or third day. Every time I went to visit her it killed me to see her lying in bed like that every night. I would go home and pray that she would be better the next time I saw her. But the next time I went to her room she had just gotten back from surgery. I felt like I was going to die on the spot.

That night I went home and I prayed. I didn't pray that she would get better. I prayed to God if I could take the pain for her, but I couldn't. All the nights I prayed that I could take the pain away, I couldn't. It felt so unfair that it had to happen to us.

After a long time she came home to us, and in a little while she was okay. But, I know it wasn't just the pills that made her better.

Daniel, age 11, Shannon's brother



of But us them have one thing all

Right but got a little bald yet. my hair is short she has long hair



Journal by Shannon, age 7, Daniel's sister

Sometimes I feel the need to be like a child, to be unconcerned about my hair or clothes, existing only in this moment – fully aware and content to be free to explore, unaffected by what others think or do.

AWAKEN THE SPIRIT WITHIN

A cool breeze blew in from the ocean and yet stillness surrounded the woman huddled against the dunes. Her gaze was fixed on the horizon where sea and sky met. Gulls swooped and soared overhead, their cries giving voice to the silent screams within whenever her thoughts turned to her diagnosis of cancer.

A single tear lay like a pearl upon her cheek. A solitary symbol of the turmoil she felt as she wrestled with her emotions: fear and despair, anger and grief. And even then, a feeling of hope flickered.

Soft curly hair, once her crowning glory, was now fragile strands. Lost in thought, she brushed at wisps of her hair. In disbelief she felt these strands in her palm. As she shook them loose, they were caught in a frenzied dance before the wind released them into the ocean. "If only it were that easy," she thought, "to just let go of the fear and uncertainty."

As she imagined releasing her fears into the wind, a wistful smile softened the lines of tension that creased her forehead. "What did I do to deserve this? Why did this happen to me, to my family? When can I have my old life back?" The rhythmic sounds of the ocean soothed her battered spirit. The wind eased to a gentle whisper. Something deep inside stirred. The tear, so long motionless, fell.

As though a reflection of her inner spirit, the sea-sprite atop the waves reflected a kindred spirit within. "Come with me and touch my inner power, for it is mighty. Know the majesty of the deep, the calm of the lagoon. Share with me your dreams; let your spirit soar, for I am sister to your healing tears. Hold fast, and in the very depths of darkness you will find glory in the brilliance of unimagined treasures until once more we dance in the waters warmed by a joyous sun." So in trusting her inner wisdom, she embarked on a journey of self-discovery.

Marion



Tile by Linda

HEALING

Does healing lie in glistening tears
That fall like crystal pearls,
To wend their melancholy path
As anguished grief unfurls?
Or does it lie in vistas new,
In grit and fortitude,
In hope and prayer and laughter
Where sorrow can't intrude?
The answer lies in life itself,
The time that's yet to be,
And in the past, and in the now,
And all that lives in me.

Marion

You have to be very quiet to hear the wise still voice inside.



AN INSIGHT

In the process of painting even the task of choosing the colours of the paint was a revelation. I found myself putting the most miniscule amounts of paint on the paper plate I was using as a palette. They were mere droplets. As I began to work on my own, I noticed a discrepancy between how much paint I had taken compared to the amounts others had put on their plates.

I remembered being a child and receiving a new set of paints. The shiny metal box held a paintbrush, and an array of brilliant jewel colours. It was very special. I was aware money was scarce for non-essentials. When the paints were gone, I probably wouldn't get another set any too soon. I used the paints sparingly. I was afraid to use them up. In fact, I didn't really relish using them, as much as I could have had I not had this concern.

As I painted my tile I realized that I was holding on to old beliefs from my childhood, which were keeping me stuck. I can now use as much paint as I want. In fact, I could go out and buy more paint if I wanted. I found this insight very freeing!

Ruby



TRUST

What you see is a picture of a chickadee perched in the open hand of a kind, gentle and loving friend. The story of connectedness that goes with this picture is far reaching. It was taken when I was out walking with my friend Kathryn. We go back a long way. When Kathryn and I meet we often spend our time walking. One of our favourite spots is Fish Creek Park. On this particular day, Kathryn decided we would feed the chickadees. I'd never done this before and had no idea what I would experience. We walked together along the path to a place where we could hear a family of these wonderful birds. Kathryn put some birdseed (the most important being sunflower seed) in the palm of my hand. She then told me to hold my hand very still.

It wasn't long before the chickadees were flying by to take a look at the situation. Kathryn explained that they needed to fly by a couple of times to decide if they were safe. I could not believe how I felt the first time I had a bird land on my hand! It is times like this that I believe I become most like a child again. There was wonder and delight and fascination; there was a discovery that a small and delicate creature would stand trustingly in the palm of my hand. I have heard of instances such as these described as moments of pure joy – pure bliss – and that is what this time was to me.

The picture said so much. I call it "Trust." Trust is a small yet powerful word. It is something that comes naturally to a child. Trust is something that can be lost over a lifetime, and yet it is something that we need to find to move peacefully on in this world.

Sometimes we are the chickadee, and sometimes we are the gentle loving hand, and if we trust in both of these we are tied one to the other. We are connected.

Denise

PHYSICS

I was amazed to learn that according to the principles of physics an egg is a model of strength. They always seemed so very fragile. Apparently, when one considers the thickness of the shell, which maintains the balance between the forces acting inward and the forces acting outward, the egg comes close to perfection. Mathematicians and physicists have laboured over the development of formulae and techniques for replicating the shape of the egg. Many of the models exploded or collapsed in the struggle to achieve this delicate balance.

I marvel at our likeness to Humpty Dumpty. The human body is perfectly constructed. Yet, how frequently do we push it to the edge and sustain a precarious balance. How often do we withstand all manner of external pressure to be strong, self-sufficient, capable and giving. How often do we triumph over our own internal obstacles of inadequacy, weakness, failure and guilt.

Once perfect specimens, we have now been broken by circumstance, by factors beyond our control, by forces that have no mathematical formulae or scientific procedure for reconstruction.

It is hard to live with a heightened sense of uncertainty and vulnerability. The "tough stuff," so familiar and rehearsed, is no longer an asset. It obstructs the path and clouds the view of what the task has now become. Until the fragile aspect can be fully appreciated, repair seems tenuous. Putting the pieces back together without a respect for the fragile inner part that makes us human will only yield a collage of loosely connected pieces. Allowing ourselves to be vulnerable may be a key component in finding the strength necessary for recovery after cancer.

I now have a new appreciation for both the strength and the fragility of an egg. Unlike all the king's horses and all the king's men, I hope I can achieve the delicate balance I once took for granted.

Jeanette



*Like Humpty Dumpty, I have been broken.
Without a blueprint for rebuilding, I live
with a heightened sense of vulnerability,
seeking a new design that incorporates
both my weakness and my strength.*

DANDELION

I've always wanted to do clowning. It was one of those things I procrastinated about. I thought it would be a way to develop my "hidden" inner self. As a clown I could be spontaneous, allowing the free-spirited and playful part of myself to come out, without worrying about what others might think. Behind the clown's colourful costume, painted face, bright red nose and funny shoes, no one would know me.

Basically I have been a very shy, timid person my whole life. I've always known, though, that there was this other part of me pushing to get out. Over the years I have lost myself, caring for others and working long hours. With the cancer diagnosis I came to see that I needed to take time to understand my feelings and to develop myself in a way that I felt good about me.

During the time I was just newly diagnosed with cancer I took a trip to visit my eighty-five-year-old mother. Initially I didn't tell her of my situation, because shortly after my arrival she had a major heart attack. It was touch and go for a while. When she was out of the woods, she said to me: "I guess I'm just like a dandelion. I know they're just old weeds, but they are tenacious and they just keep coming back and back."

When my mother found out about my diagnosis of cancer she said to me, "Don't forget, you're like me now, you're like a dandelion." I didn't think much about it until after my surgery, and the beginning of radiation treatments, when I could see how true it was. The lights went on and I decided, okay, I'm going to become a clown, and my clowning name will be Dandelion.

Helen

When I'm creating I feel like a child way up in a tree house. The whole world is shut out and I am apart and above it all. It seems like nothing matters for I have escaped for a while to a sanctuary.



ONE

I always
wondered why
The flamingo stood
on One leg,
when he had two
And I always wondered
if the flamingo,
when he stood on one leg,
would wonder what his purpose was
And when I lost one breast
to cancer I thought,
the flamingo and I
have something in common
And then, I would imagine speaking
to the flamingo...
exchanging the keys to our secrets,
that we must have a purpose...
to discover
the meaning
of One.

Nibal





THE EAGLE

I chose the Eagle because it reminds me of the Biblical story that rings true in my life. The story is of Noah during the time of the flood and all the animals. Forced to stay on the Ark, Noah asked a bird to go and find out if the land was dry enough for them to come to shore. The bird, accompanied by another, did not arrive back to the Ark. It was then that Noah knew the flood had passed and it was safe for them to find land.

Like the bird in this story I am choosing to fly in search of a safe and healthy place for myself, rather than hoping it will find me. I once felt like a helpless bird, with clipped wings, stuck in a cage of fear and depression over my illness and life circumstances.

Slowly, I am finding the strength to reach within and heal on a level deeper than I've ever known before. It is within this depth that I've discovered another set of wings. Wings that illness and sadness cannot reach. My newfound wings and faith in humanity and myself have set me free. I am no longer that bird in a cage. Rather, I am a lover of freedom as I fly across the sky.

Nibal



WOMEN

As centre and part of fertile earth,
grounded between Heaven and Earth;
Her aura on the right side emits angelic rays
and a Divine spirit.
Her left side is receiving healing rays of beautiful
light to restore her injured Spirit.
She is holding her breast as an offering of all the
joys and sorrows of her life.
Her rose breast is shedding petal tears.
Her tears are flowing to the site of her
lost breast and to her heart.

Veronica



Watercolour by Lorna

DEAR BODY:

It's been a tough year – but we made it. We've both been through a lot and we've got a ways to go yet, to heal the wounds. I wasted so many years wishing – and sometimes trying – to make you into something different. And it was only the last six or seven years that I was comfortable co-habiting with you. A passionate and thoughtful lover helped me loosen the shackles of society's expectations of how you had to "measure up." That led not just to acceptance, but to delight in your own unique abilities and beauty.

I was filled with wonder to watch the changes in you through pregnancy. I enjoyed being pregnant and wondered why I hadn't done that sooner. And I had looked forward to being pregnant again. But finding a lump in your breast has dashed that desire. Finding the lump was a concern. I remember being too busy to go in for a check-up, and then agreeing to wait the three weeks for an opening. But I felt the lump growing, so reassurances that eighty percent of lumps are benign didn't ease the worry.

I still wasn't prepared for the news that it was malignant, though. I felt betrayed by you – you who had carried me so well through four decades. No major illnesses or accidents and now such a huge, sudden step closer to mortality.

Why us? Why now? Regardless of who or what gets the blame, I'm still left with a gap in the trust I felt with you. I wasn't aware of any warnings that cells inside you had stopped functioning normally and had become cancerous. I'm trying to pay more attention to you now – but every ache, stomach upset, lingering cough, makes me worry. Gone are the carefree years of believing in immortality. Losing a breast seemed like a small sacrifice in a life and death struggle. That decision, at the time, seemed much less difficult than deciding about chemotherapy. In fact, I was euphoric after surgery. It was a concrete step to eradicating the cancer from you. I'm glad I had Molly and Roger kiss that breast one last time the night before surgery. It seemed a little bizarre, but I needed a loving gesture to mark its passage. It had given us all pleasure in different ways and at different times.

A year later and Molly still asks when she can nurse again. Less frequently, but I know how much she liked to suckle your nipples and snuggle in close. She still snuggles in, but there is less connection. It's a relationship that ended before its time – for all of us. I don't take the same pride in you I once did. I worry about other people's reactions. When I'm in a public change room, I find a cubicle or turn my back to others. I no longer strip in the shower. I'm saddened by this change, but I don't feel the confidence and strength to pick up where we left off. I am trying, so don't give up



Watercolour by Veronica

on me. If I can't accept you minus a breast, what hope for sisters or brothers without a limb, an eye, hearing – whatever. Just how accepting am I of them, if I can't accept your imperfections?

Just being able to voice that makes me hopeful that we'll find a way forward. And trust that other people will move toward acceptance if I can make that step too.

I take you for granted a lot. That changed when I was diagnosed with cancer. But ten months later and I've slipped back into my old habits of expecting a lot from you, without giving much back. I can take better care of you. Let me lead the way, so we can continue on together.

Love,
Sheryl



THE WRITING ON THE WALL

raising my arms to the heavens my breasts are free
like flags unfurled with the wind up
then palm to palm (not trees these)
– press together – the surgeon says
& I am still disbelieving
that I'm revealing all at once & upright too
where is the gentle modesty
of one breast covered & I supine
the other palpated by a medical man acting
as if he's not really doing what he's really doing
his eyes steadfastly read the wall
as if to prove he's not really doing...
this time it is I who lock eyes with the wall
pretending he's not really doing...
pretending his eyes are wall-walking
instead of very studiously perusing
my raised breasts for signs of cancer
the words double-exposure come to mind
on account of my breasts both out at once
on account of the second set of eyes
a surgeon's trainee's trained on my breasts
I know all these mammary gymnastics are necessary
but even so, I am now with a surgeon's wall
on the friendliest of terms
& you know that old song "Hello Wall"?
I've just rewritten it
& by the way...he found what he was looking for

Anne



MY BIRDSEED PROSTHESIS

I am seventy years old now. After I had my first mastectomy in 1986, I had trouble adjusting to a new prosthesis. I found it heavy and sticky in hot weather. I was having tea with a group of ladies one day and we began talking about breast cancer. One little old lady said: "You know, in the old days, there were no prostheses, but you could write to the Eaton's catalogue and tell them your bra size and they would make you one out of birdseed. The weight was just enough that it stayed in place and it was not hot in summer because it breathed."

Some time later we were planning a Caribbean cruise. It would be hot and humid on some of these islands, and the thought of the birdseed prosthesis came back to mind. I decided to try and make one.

On the way to the Pet Shop, I was thinking and planning in my head how I would make the prosthesis, all the while wondering if it would really work. "I would like a bag of birdseed," I told the nice young man who came up to wait on me. "What kind of birds do you want to attract?" he said. A very legitimate question, I have to admit, but I was so unprepared for it. I stammered something like "ah, ah, any kind of birds. We're going to the country and I just want to feed the birds. I would like a big bag." When I got home, I opened the bag. There were seeds of all sizes and shapes; some were really big, so I put them through a sieve. I then proceeded to make the prosthesis.

At one of the ports in the Caribbean, a native man working with a photographer was trying to get tourists to have their pictures taken with an exotic bird perched on his finger. He approached me. I backed away. He came closer, insisting that I try and pet the bird. I was getting pretty uptight. All I could think of was my birdseed prosthesis. I had visions of that bird getting into the front of my sundress and pecking away! But the man would not give up. I quickly grabbed my straw hat and put it in front of me.

I used the birdseed prosthesis for that trip only. It worked, but the thought of hungry birds following me around was enough to make me adjust to the silicone prosthesis when I returned home.

Margot



Ink, Pencil Crayon and Watercolour by Judy Hamilton (used with permission)



SWEET REPAIR

"...my crumbling temple needs sweet repair..." lyrics by Phoebe Snow

There was something I wanted to feel, but I couldn't really grasp it. There were things I needed to say, but I could not get the words out of my mouth. And there was someone I wanted to know better, but I could not reach her. And then of course I was told that I had cancer and the green lights turned red as I came to a heartbreaking stop. After that, and through the many paths I was compelled to explore, I began to feel, speak and know in a way that was profound and surprising. By facing the unknowns of a cancer diagnosis, I learned to work with what I had: myself, my spirit and my ability to understand life. Never have I been in such close proximity with my entire being. I found the person I needed to know.

I often think the definition of a cancer patient is similar to that of a hero, an ordinary person doing extraordinary things. In this case, those things were unimaginable until the new reality took hold, making the incomprehensible something akin to normal.

All of a sudden I was deeply involved with issues, procedures and an uncertain future that I had thought of as a terrible, unjustifiable or happening to others. I was now the "other." That picture of disaster I envisioned now had a spot saved for me. Cancer is an event that comes fully equipped with participants, spectators and announcements. My own ability to do the things necessary to restore my health with vigour and dedication became standard practice after a time. But first, I had to acknowledge that I needed to change and should I not do so on my own behalf, change would arrive in its own time with its own terms. At least by taking some responsibility for my health and happiness, I could move from the frozen spectator I had become to a shaker and mover in my own life.

And even as the active participant that I later became, I still had periods of dissociation with my body. There were occasions of testing or medical interventions where I felt my mind separate off from that body. The pain was not just physical. It was for me the deep trauma of having lost my confidence in my body's ability to be healthy and to repair. And there was my horror at having myself worked on in ways I could not see, but could vividly imagine. I am a visual artist and my mind creates images when given such a void.

My life. Two words that I have had to consider in light of possible loss. What did I need to do differently? What could I do to support this body, which at times I viewed as a rental that I had been given and perhaps had not treated as well as I might. I came to a point where I needed to believe how I was feeling and take action.

I made major changes within the months that spanned my diagnosis, surgery and radiation. I took a break from work and rested. I traded in some of my hyper-independence and let my friends help and console me. I gave up eating dairy products and started a regimen of very nutritious eating. I had counseling that reinforced the need to reduce stress. I knew before the cancer that I was living with too much pressure. I had just lacked the courage to change.

My partner and I agreed to separate after twenty-three years of being together. I bought a house and moved my life and studio. These events were more traumatic at times than my disease. But it was dealing with the illness that gave me confidence to go further.

All these changes took place within eight months from the date of my diagnosis and four months after radiation. The cancer scare had activated my dormancy. I felt I no longer had time to complain about what was not working in my life. Rather, I needed to make my life worth living. Every minute began to count.

So what is the gift cancer gave to me? Well, I've developed quite a taste for living. I have reconnected to my own spirit and power. I've developed a trust that everything will fall into its place and I simply must do my bit as best as I am able. I found love and support from friends, family, colleagues and where I least expected it, from strangers. I have felt deeply the meaning of kindness. And I have begun to feel an enduring happiness that depends on my attitude to each lovely molecule of my continuously reshaping life.

I see my experience over these past ten months as one that leaves me on the threshold of unfolding vistas; each one larger, clearer and more breathable than the one before. This must be what it is like to accept and heal. I am going there.

*Story & Painting by Cherie Moses
(used with permission)*

قلبرها



4 7 7 4 4 4



Photo by Georgia

THE GARDENER'S GIFT

In my experience, gardeners tend to be more robust and relaxed than most people. Gardening has certainly contributed to my own healing as I battle cancer.

Gardening is a refuge, a temporary sanctuary from which you emerge revitalized and ready to face the world again. The energy I get from a couple of hours in the garden is more than enough to prepare me for whatever challenges lie ahead.

The scent of a lilac, the whisper of the wind through the trees, the feel of dirt on my hands, the brilliant colours of all those beautiful blooms, the deep and meditative solitude, the chance to experiment with new plants in new combinations, this is why I love to garden. It's the ultimate therapy.

Of course, gardening isn't all a bed of roses, so to speak. An unseasonable frost or insect invasion that wipes out your entire garden can create loads of stress. And you should have seen my reaction when my husband Ted ploughed under an entire row of perfectly good beets! But then, sometimes a good release of rage can be therapeutic, too.

Each human being is blessed with but one life; one life to cherish love and friendship, to marvel at nature's wonders, to appreciate the arts, to explore the world, and to garden. In sum, one life to find happiness and, if we're lucky, to leave the world a better place than it was when we arrived.

Since each of us is limited to one all too brief life, that makes it all the more vital to ensure that our life is as fulfilling as possible. The greatest human tragedy is the tragedy of what might have been; the tragedy of lost potential.

The Honourable Lois E. Hole, CM, AOE
Former Lieutenant Governor of Alberta,
Gardener

Photography

A roll of film and a camera are the photographer's essential tools, which makes this creative modality readily available to anyone. Certainly, it is also helpful to know the workings of the camera and the visual principles of photography. We have been fortunate to have professional photographers who not only share their considerable technical expertise, but who are empathetic individuals understanding the physical, emotional and spiritual challenges that can arise with any illness.

Sometimes we encourage participants to just go out and take pictures of things that attract their attention. At other times a theme or topic is provided to direct the artist's eye to possible subjects that tell a story or share an insight or a moment of beauty. Capturing special moments and telling stories through an image gives participants an opportunity to focus on everyday beauty in their lives and their world.

*Life
has sprung back
and
there is still beauty.*







Photo by Patti

*Whenever I feel down,
I pick up my camera and go!*



Photo by Adele

CLOSE UP

I noticed my son Jordy looking intensely through his grandfather's magnifying glass. He was completely absorbed in the smallest of things in our garden. As I watched him, I thought of how as adults we sometimes forget to appreciate the magnificence of our five senses. We tend to take them for granted, assuming that they will always be there. It is not until we lose one, or find that they are diminished in some way due to illness or aging, that we understand the precious gift they are.

Lora



PERSPECTIVE

Your eyes get a hundred times bigger – after an experience with cancer. You see so much more of the world, and...from a bigger perspective.

Steven



BLUE ROSE

Everything I see through my photographs is related to the world around me – or nature. Through photography I can see my life – a picture of a sunrise represents me getting up early to a fresh new day. The purple rose that I photographed tells me that life is very tender and pure, just like children. The colour of the rose, a bluish purple hue, expresses to me that my life with a colostomy and liver resection is not natural. I'm just like the rose that was dyed a different colour.

Lora



Photo by Lee

PLAYING IN MY BACKYARD

My husband was ecstatic that I was taking photography. For months he had been trying to encourage me to go out on trips with him, but I always refused. Having a reason to take photographs each week made me want to go beyond my neighbourhood. My husband and I took little jaunts out of town so that I could take pictures. We did these things together, just like we used to.

It was similar to the feeling a child may have as they begin the phase of playing in their own backyard, and then gradually going to play in the backyards of others. As the child keeps going out a little further afield, their world is enlarged and expanded. What I found happening to me was that happiness and a sense of joy came, especially as my photographs turned out so well. There was a sense of life returning and, little by little, a return to normalcy.

Iris



Photo by Sharon

WATER DROPLETS

There's something about water droplets that I find intriguing. I'm drawn to pictures of water on leaves and flowers. Perhaps it's a symbol of cleansing, freshness and renewal, or, maybe it's a sign of the tears I wish I could cry, but which now seem to be stuck somewhere deep inside. I've always loved spring rain showers as they leave me feeling cozy, refreshed and somehow more able to alter my perspective of the world.

Taking a close view of these flowers, I saw how crisp and clean they looked, allowing the rain to fall on them and do what rain needs to do – clean off the dirt, nourish the roots and encourage them to grow. I think our tears were created for much the same reason – to cleanse our souls and embrace growth. I tend to withhold my own tears for fear of appearing weak or for fear of the judgments of others and therefore I miss out on the very soul cleansing that I need. Sometimes I wish I were a flower – able to let the rain fall where it must and become cleansed and refreshed and, in my own time, grow from it. I have heard trials in life referred to as storms. The flowers don't seem to fret about the storms as I do, they embrace them and do what flowers are meant to do...grow to be beautiful and bring joy to those who take the time to look at them, smell them and discover their beauty and place on this earth.

Sharon

A CANDLE CAUGHT MY EYE

Photography allows one not only to catch glimpses of the world through the eye of the camera, but also to feel the joy of capturing or re-creating a moment in time.

Sitting in my kitchen one afternoon, contemplating the accumulating stack of papers and deadlines requiring immediate attention, a feeling of overwhelming stress enveloped me. How would I ever begin to tackle this mountain of work and all of the responsibilities attached?

Tears began to fill the corners of my eyes. I felt panic. Then I found myself looking around the room, trying to find something that would bring a sense of calm to the situation. A candle caught my eye. This small, cream-coloured taper, which I lit and watched closely for a few minutes, began to ease the tension. Little by little, the feeling of chaos began to subside, replaced by a feeling of quiet.

The small, still voice within gave me a nudge, to catch the moment. I have always enjoyed taking photographs, and recently I have had this interest renewed through Arts in Medicine. Picking up my camera, I began to focus the lens on the flame, and a lovely, calming image resulted. Recognizing that I needed not to fret the small things was a turning point. Hanging on the wall in our den is the photograph of the flame of a simple candle. It has become a touchstone, reminding me to calm down, go slow, and live in the moment.

Lora



Photo by Pat

INTENTION

It seems that when we put our intentions towards creating, surges of energy pour through the very fibre of our being. Doing any activity with attention and intention is so different than aimless wandering. Climbing into my truck one day and heading out to the country to take photographs, the joy that flowed into me and lifted my spirits was just phenomenal. While I was just going for a drive in the country, I had a purpose, and the difference was amazing. Some of my favourite pictures came from that day. I have learned this is one means through which I can create energy. For me it is most definitely a healing energy.

Rae



TIME

This is a picture of my husband, who has been my rock, my support and my steadying influence during this cancer experience. As I look at the picture I see The Clock. Time becomes important when you go through a diagnosis of cancer.

How much time do I have?

Will I be there for this or that important event?

What will I do with the time I have?

Will I have time to do all I want to do?

I realized that these were the same questions that one asks whether one has cancer or not. They are the questions of life, particularly as one grows older.

I am now using my time for things that matter. I don't wait. I do things now. I am curious and seek the special rather than the ordinary. The event must really be worth the price of entry, because the price of entry is time.

Darlene



THE BUMBLE BEE

You have heard the saying, "Take time to stop and smell the roses." My wife and I always kept very busy lives. About a year after she died, I decided to pursue photography, which had been her passion and now mine. I enjoyed taking wildlife pictures, so I would spend many hours in the outdoors.

On this occasion I decided to stand in the middle of an apple tree, which was in full blossom. I was fascinated with the number of bumblebees that were buzzing around looking for flowers. After standing there for almost an hour, I noticed a particularly large bee going from one flower to another. I thought about my life, always in a hurry like that bee. Looking through the lens I took this picture of the bee hovering in front of a flower. When I got it developed, it reminded me of my wife and I hurrying around, not noticing all of the wonderful things in life.

I needed to stop for a short time to appreciate that I still had my son, my friends and the memories of my wife. It is not only people that we can learn from, but also nature in its simplest form.

The idea of having chaos in our lives is true, from animals to bugs to people. Being able to manage the chaos and find time to appreciate what we have takes a conscious effort not practiced by all. It is only after a life-changing event that we realize how much we have missed. My son and I now take time to appreciate our lives, even if it is a walk to stop and smell the roses.

Dave and his son, Sean



MOVING FORWARD

Even though I have been altered in some way,
I can still move forward.

Marilyn



POSSIBILITIES

When I came upon these beautiful flowers growing out of the bark of this tree, I was moved to tears. It made me think of my own possibilities and gave me hope.

Marilyn

Photography has opened my eyes and the window to my soul. I have found self-worth through self-expression, and I'm discovering beauty and peace within. It is experiencing everything to the fullest – the day, the sunlight, clouds and wind, my interactions with others, and feeling colours in my heart.



OUT ON A LIMB – FEELING FREE

From inside my nest to out on a limb. A huge transition has taken place in my life since I was diagnosed with cancer. It was a long, painful process, but has resulted in a sense of freedom I never thought possible.

I had taken a picture of a squirrel peeking out of his nest as my “before” picture. Squirrels spend their time and energy collecting acorns and stashing them away. My acorns were thoughts and feelings I hid from others. I pushed them into the deepest, darkest recesses of the tree. If they were ever brought to light it could be terrible. Crying was taboo. If I talked, I might cry, so I just did not talk. Eventually, something had to give. There was so much bottled up inside, the tree was starting to crack.

I needed help unlearning the old ideas and developing healthier coping skills. Talking things through and giving myself permission to cry took a long time. The resulting sense of freedom was worth the effort. My “after” picture is the squirrel out on a limb secure enough to be out in the open, feeling free.

Rhonda



THE BROAD-LEAFED WILLOW HERB

I have watched these flowers for several summers now and they are truly resilient. As the snow melts off the mountaintops and causes the creeks to swell over their banks, these flowers become totally immersed in water. The water will be a foot or more deep over the gravelly river bar. You can see the Willow Herb with its roots, leaves and flowers still intact as the creek sends down a constant heavy flow.

One might think that the swiftness of the water would uproot these flowers, but not so. It's as if the plants give themselves to the river. They bend and shift to accommodate whatever flow they will face. And, when the water recedes they once again stand brilliant on the gravelly bank, as if nothing of any significance had happened.

Denise



PASSING THROUGH THE SHADOWS

This photograph was taken as I approached the final stage of my cancer treatment. It had been seven months. I had one month left to go and all the scans indicated I was disease free. I was beginning to see the light at the end of the tunnel. This photograph reflects those feelings. Light and beauty can now be glimpsed through the dark and decayed old growth.

Marie



WATER HAZARD

This is a reflection of the clouds in the sky and long grass in a pond (also known as a golf course water hazard) taken on a cloudy day. Just shortly before taking this photograph, I could hear a group of golfers marvelling at the potential number of golf balls they could fish out of the bottom of the pond! This water hazard is usually so murky nothing can be found. When I approached to take a picture, my eye was looking at all the flies and grass reflections shimmering on the surface of the water.

Then, looking through the viewfinder at a cluster of grass, I noticed the beautiful heart-shaped reflection made by a few strands of grass. I thought of the different perspectives we see when we look at the overall picture, and when we focus on the little things. These are treasures to be found either way, when we least expect it.

Linda



BRIGHT LEAVES

Like lighting a candle – a few bright leaves certainly make the surroundings light up.

Tanny



LONELY TEARS

Many times I have felt alone and isolated with my tears. I was trying to complete a photography assignment capturing images illustrating textures. Chemotherapy made me feel quite unwell at the time, so much so that I wasn't feeling up to venturing very far to take pictures. As I sat in my car one day in the pouring rain, I realized that I didn't have to go a great distance to get the pictures I needed. The droplets of water on the windshield reminded me of the lonely tears I have, being alone sometimes and not being able to do the things I once loved to do.

Lora



A BOWL OF CHERRIES

Ah, those special moments in life: the first snowfall, the new blades of grass, the birth of a baby, a flower in bloom, playing hopscotch, running through a puddle with our bare feet, a bowl of cherries. This is the child within us all. This is life.

Judy



LIFE'S CURVES

What would we learn in life if we didn't have all these curves thrown into the life experience?

Lora



A GALAXY OF STARS

I was basically a "black-and-white" person. There was no place in my world for the abstract! Now, I see things differently. What used to be ordinary or even ugly can be beautiful. Lemon has changed to lemonade! I see beauty all around. Yes, good things can come from bad experiences.

I took a series of photographs through a window in our condo. This window had been nothing but an eyesore and a bone of contention for me, particularly as it was impossible to see out of it for most of the winter.

As I walked by this window one bright sunny day in February, I saw an exquisite scene. It was as if I was looking down on a flower garden, with the layered rows of frost being rows in that garden. The pebbled frost at the bottom was a row of soil. Then there was a row of flowers with small petals, followed by another row of soil, and finally a row of flowers with larger petals. If I looked really carefully, I could see angels among the flowers.

I looked at the photo a few months later and saw a forest of trees, with the edge of a large body of water at the bottom, and a smaller body of water in the middle. Maybe it was an airstrip at the bottom with a long, narrow lake in the middle. Then again, maybe it's a path or a switchback road in the mountains.

The sun is brighter and is glowing through the delicate lacy patterns. The friendship ball suspended in front of the window looks like the world. There is a path beneath it. I don't know where the path is going because it's the road to the future. Depending on where I choose to start down the path, I'm either headed towards a brighter place, or a darker one. This could be a reminder that we are all a small part of a much larger world, and that we don't always know where our paths will lead. We don't have total control over our destiny. When I look at the same window at night it looks like a galaxy of stars. However, it could also be a golden light at the end of the tunnel.

Sharon



WISPY CLOUDS

Simply look up to see treetops stretching to touch
the soft gentle cloud formations
hurried along by the breezes aloft.
Playfully swirled into feathers, angel wings,
long curly locks, layers of dancing silk chiffon
or white streaming ribbons.
One can only imagine the endless possibilities.
I too like the treetops, stretch up to touch
a sense of tranquility, peace and joyfulness.
Imagining the possibilities on my journey toward healing.

Donna



SNOW LADEN TREE

There was an early snowfall this year. Suddenly the trees
were burdened with a heavy wet blanket and the skies
were leaden. However, with the light starting to break
through the clouds I find joy in the beauty and strength
of this tree and the promise of sunnier days returning.

Lorna



SNOW ANGELS

Soon after a fresh snowfall, a friend and I were out
walking. The snow was thick and inviting, we felt so
relaxed and in a non-threatening place, that we decided
to draw on skills we'd learned as children and make
snow angels! Prior to my cancer experience I would
never have dreamt of doing something so "childish."
I fit into the typical stereotype image of an accountant
– always serious, staid and acting properly. Since my
cancer experience and particularly since participating
in the Arts in Medicine program, I've learnt to take
it easier and to have fun along the way. To live each
moment as best I can.

Sharon

*Photography wakes me up to new parts
of myself that have been hidden for
a long time. This week it was to the
adventurer in me. I don't want to sit in
one place doing the same thing anymore!*

FIND THE BEAUTY THAT LIES BENEATH YOUR WEEDS

Early one morning I ventured outside in the rain, camera in hand, to see if I could snap any spectacular shots. I drove around and saw some pretty trees, but nothing was really grabbing my attention. I got back home, parked my car and was drawn to a field behind the house. The field was covered with ugly, dreaded, white, allergy-producing bundles of dandelion seeds, something that most hay fever sufferers, such as myself, have grown to hate. I discovered that I was drawn to these nasty little weeds, and as I crouched down to inspect them found I was actually intrigued by them.

Moving from weed to weed, I discovered the uniqueness, beauty and intricacy of each one. This was something I had never noticed before. What had always been considered a menacing weed was actually an amazing little creation – depending on my perspective. When I took the time to get close, I found true beauty in my weeds. I pondered this discovery and realized that so often in my life I have grown to hate what I view as my own weeds that lie within. These are things I would like to change in my life, like who I really am, and parts of my being that I could gladly live without. I now realize that I have never looked closely at my “dreaded weeds”. I never actually got down and studied them closely.

I thought about my unattractive inner weeds. Perhaps they were really flowers in disguise, or maybe they serve some purpose in my life and even in the lives of others. Maybe a purpose that I just can't see. Could it be that what I view as weeds, others view as beauty? I have changed my perspective on dandelions as weeds. I saw a beauty in them that I had never really taken the time to notice before. This is definitely a lesson I can use in my own life when I'm feeling judgmental and demanding of my own self and my shortcomings. Perhaps the things I'd like to change about myself aren't weeds after all. I need to look closer to find the beauty that lies beneath my weeds.

Sharon



Sculpture & Soapstone Carving

A block of clay or soapstone and a few tools are the basics needed to begin sculpting and carving. Arts in Medicine classes teach the basic techniques and provide various sculpting tools, as well as the contacts for kilns in which finished work can be fired at the proper temperatures, depending on the kind of clay used.

Participants describe the experience of working with clay as a vehicle to more fully understand and deal with a change in body image as a result of cancer surgery or cancer treatment. As in all of our groups, a professional artist and a psychologist work as a team to facilitate the psychological and spiritual processes that are a part of this creative work.



QUAN YIN SCULPTURE

Quan Yin is the feminine emanation of the compassionate Buddha. She is also known as the "Hearer of Cries" in Tibet and other parts of Asia. The emanation of compassion has 1000 hands. It is said that whatever is needed is in one of her 1000 hands. These hands are dedicated to volunteers and health professionals everywhere, who together create places of healing compassion.

© C. Regina Kelley [Khenpo Drolma]
(Used with permission)

Each scrape of the clay was like an internal cleansing, a release of excess baggage that needed to be let go.



When I start to work with my clay, it's usually with a feeling of anticipation and excitement to see if I can create with my hands what I see with my eyes.



Anonymous

WHAT PARTICIPANTS SAID WHILE SCULPTING

On Clay

My hands back in the clay – moulding, caressing, stretching, what a wonderful feeling! I am one with my emotions in the clay. This torso is my torso. The torso gives a voice, a visual expression to what I feel about my body. It says what I don't and sometimes cannot say to people around me. It is life. See what I feel.

It isn't just a lump of clay before me. It's an extension of my self.

On Caring for Ourselves

Like the clay, if left unattended, we can become dried up and brittle. We must look after ourselves, even though it may seem like pampering. Looking after oneself is a means of self-preservation.

On Bravery

Working with clay is a quick study in bravery. What comes forth is in your hands. But it is not written in stone. As in life, you can change your mind and go in a different direction.

On Neglect

If you neglect the clay, let it dry out, it responds in a like manner and is no longer workable. So like our own bodies; if we neglect ourselves, our soul, it dries out – becomes stubborn and resistant, no longer malleable.

On the Critic Within

As the critic within rested, the creative and intuitive part of me awakened. Working with clay, with my hands, I found an inner rhythm was generated, making it a whole body experience. A glowing smile radiated from within and consumed me.

On Emerging

Art emerges from this block of clay that I have so lovingly moulded and shaped and another part of my self is born.

On Stillness

Stillness of the soul is a stepping stone to healing.



TORSO

I knew I wanted to sculpt a torso as a way to come to terms with my feelings about my body since my mastectomy. Initially I felt quite disconnected from the form, but as I worked I found that the figure was emerging from a shell. That is what it has been for me. I am emerging into a "New-Me." One who is not defined by any job or my roles as a mother, wife or teacher. Perhaps it is even an emergence into a new "calling" in life.

Cancer is life-transforming in many ways. But for me this experience of cancer, as difficult and complex as it is, has been an opportunity to see what it can give and say about me and life in return!

I was pleased with my sculpture and really liked her. She is quite beautiful, and in fact I feel that her body would have been somewhat like mine when I was a young woman. As I worked I found myself caressing the clay as it took its form. In a way it was translating into a caress coming back to myself.

As I finished up my piece I decided to put my name on it. And as I wrote "Norma," I felt a flutter – a beautiful "love moment," I guess about me, about my name, Norma. All I could think of was Love – it was a very slight moment.

Later I reflected back to a party I was at where I saw a picture of myself twenty-five years ago. I was amazed at how beautiful I was. I knew, though, that I probably didn't feel that way about myself at the time. Like many young women, I undoubtedly wished I looked different, better, slimmer. Now I feel the true essence from within. I am learning to love myself even though the outer me is altered.

Norma

MERCEDES WOMAN (A TRUE CLASSIC)

She is the Mercedes Woman. She stands all alone in a bed of rose petals to show her gentleness. Her body is very powerful. One arm reaches high in the sky to say, "Hey, look at me, I can do this."

Her other arm reaches for her colostomy, which she often does. The muscle tone in her shoulders and chest represent the strength I would like to have. This is a challenge for me. I like challenges.

The scars on her belly are replicas of my own. The first scar, the lower one, is my first surgery (the colostomy), which my doctor did not stitch up. He used packing instead, which lowers the risk of infection. The second scar is called the Mercedes Incision. This was the surgery where they removed half of my liver. It took me a month to figure out why they called it a Mercedes Incision (too many scars in the way, I guess).

Through all my surgeries, chemotherapy and radiation, the Mercedes Woman is still going strong. She has been up and down mentally, but chooses to continue. No one can help her. Physically she is on her own. Emotionally she has been inspired by Arts in Medicine. That's a satisfying experience for her. It's really the first time she has allowed herself to explore her creative side. I have come to realize that my life was missing a very nurturing and important element.

Lora Lee



RUBBLE

This sculpture is most important to me. I call it "Rubble." It is a large pile of rubble with a woman (myself) coming halfway out of this pile. I equate the pile with all of what I have been through since I was diagnosed with Breast Cancer. (I capitalized those two words because it basically stopped my former life and took over completely.)

The figure in the sculpture is lying on her left side, which is hidden in the RUBBLE. Since I had a mastectomy on my left side I keep that part hidden inside the rubble for now until I can come out comfortably as a whole human being once again. This art class has helped me in more ways than I can even describe. I hope to express myself this way again in the future. (I find that it takes longer to get through the last half of my recovery, and that is why the lady in the sculpture is lying on her side. I am still not the whole way through.)

Donna





SEVERED BREAST

Severed breast,
Scarred chest,
Fear and hope remain.

Christine

*Sculpting:
It's my antidepressant!
I am transforming
frustration into beauty.*

TORSOS

When we worked with the clay we also worked on some rather tough body image issues. Then, after two weeks, we found that the armatures we were using to hold the clay would not release. We had to do surgery on our own torsos. As this realization sunk in, a hush enveloped the room. We decided that there really was no other way. We would have to cut the clay from its wood base and start again from there.

Workshop Participant



Sculpture by Donna



Sculpture by Christine



JUST LET ME BLOOM

Following a mastectomy, I went through a difficult period adjusting to the changes in my body. Even after reconstructive surgery I struggled with my new form. I began by talking with a psychologist and at the same time I began writing about the loss of my breast. My husband never had a problem with my body, regardless of the surgeries. I was the one who had the problem. When I looked in the mirror, I didn't look like the cover girl in the Sports Illustrated magazine – even if I had two perfect breasts!

I blamed all the ugliness on the breast surgery. I felt so unfeminine! I didn't want my husband to touch my breast. In fact, he hadn't touched my breast in three years! He wasn't allowed. It didn't make me feel nurtured or sexually awakened in any way. It just didn't.

I decided to sculpt. As I worked with the clay, sculpting a torso, something surprising happened. Initially I had decided not to put breasts on her, but then, I decided I wanted breasts. They just came, and both breasts are beautiful.

Riding to work one morning on the LRT, I was thinking about my sculpting. The phrase "Just Let Me Bloom" popped into my head. The words came from nowhere, but now they are the title of my piece. They also prompted the idea of having a rose coming forth from my torso. Just like it was blooming, in all its glory.

I let this piece absorb so much of me, all of the emotions that I had stored up for several years. This is why it is powerful. I still tend to get emotional when I look at her. It was like "giving it up" – taking the sad, upsetting feelings and working them out into something beautiful. I could say, wow, this is beautiful and this piece represents me. If this is beautiful, then I'm beautiful!

It was the fifth week of the sculpting class, my husband and I were lying in bed and I told him, "You can touch my breast now." I had come to that place of acceptance and feeling whole again. Previously, I never thought of the reconstructed breast as my breast. It was just a form, an "add-on." But as I worked with the clay, shaping it, stroking it – it became me. The whole form, whether or not she looked like me, became me.

I never thought I had it in me to sculpt. But as you work with the clay and the sculpture, you grow to love it, it just grows in your hands.

Arlene

WEIGHT AND WAIT

I began my journey in clay with a rough torso. I have never worked with clay before, so the experience was new to me. The first of several pieces brought out many emotions that I had been struggling with since the loss of my breast – anguish, fear, anger and despair. Each week as I worked I became aware that my focus on the torso was changing from dislike of my new body image, to acceptance of a new form. Although each piece is an acknowledgement of me with my single breast, I have realized the “real” me is within that new physical appearance.

I especially love the torso with the weight and bird and the woman turned back looking over her shoulder. The bird sculpture shows me with the weight (small boulder) symbolizing the weightiness in my soul of the loss of my breast. The woman is looking up with hope, watching as the bird is readying to take flight. The bird is my hope to again find and free my spirit, which has also been injured with this trauma. The woman looking over her shoulder represents me looking back to those who might provide answers for why this happened. She is not angry. She is simply looking for answers.

I realize that all of my pieces have some of me in them. They have shared my pain in a sense. They are part of me.

Deanne





FEELING STUCK

As I begin sculpting I'm aware of just how much I have disregarded my creativity. This has had a crippling effect on my life. There have been traumatic life events that have kept me stuck in the past and as a result it was difficult for me to look to the future with any sense of hopefulness or possibility. I didn't see just how much I had to offer. I did not pay attention to the need to care for and love myself. I am now looking at myself with a sense of wholeness, in mind, body and spirit.

As I worked with the clay today, I dismantled the base of my sculpture – the big block of clay I had been sitting on. This block of clay represented my feeling stuck, sitting on a lot of old stuff. As a result, I haven't been able to move forward. Today it feels good to get rid of all the heaviness, to move through and let go of some of the thoughts and feelings that I have been sitting on!

Wendy



SERENITY

I have learned important things over the past five weeks, as I reflect on my sculpting. I have learned that I am still competent, even after having gone through six rounds of chemo and having my body and emotions beat up. I decided to enrol in the course because I've always been curious about sculpting and I thought it would be a good place to meet cancer patients going through the same struggles. I have been taken step by step through the principles of sculpting and I am doing a lot better than I thought I would in such a short span of time. Everyone is so supportive. We're always rooting for each other as we sculpt a new piece. It's nice to be able to put your heart into something new, finish it and feel good about it even though it's far from being perfect. I decided to do my next piece – a head. It'll be interesting to see what kind of emotions come out while I sculpt, now that I know I have cancer there.

Debbie

We brought a group of ten women together over a period of eighteen months to sculpt life-sized dolls. We worked with clay, and shared our lives with each other, and wrote about how we have been touched by cancer and other challenges.

In all, sixteen dolls have been created, each one representing some part of the creator's self. A baby created by a seventy-three-year-old woman, a gypsy, a woman of Ukrainian heritage, an angel, a pixie and a young woman, among others. We have encouraged one another, hearing about our fears, our joys, our pain, our sadness and all the while healing some aspect of the human condition.

PLAYING WITH DOLLS

If not for the doll I would not have felt the moist suppleness of the clay – sensuous and yielding under my hands. I would not have discovered the pliability and the resilience. There has been little room for frustration or an expectation too high. I have found an ability to accept what emerges – not to settle for something less, but to be satisfied with what I create.

I am making a conscious effort to bring this learning to the rest of my life, to play. How easy it is for me to forget this. To be flexible, recognizing there are many ways to achieve an end and that all are valuable. To carry on when set back and to take time to think, ponder and re-evaluate before I take the next step. I need to come to a place where I am less hard on myself. I may strive for perfection, which may be a worthy goal. I don't need it here, or now.

Workshop Participant



DOLL IN CARRIAGE

The hand knit lace bonnet and stockings were made by my maternal grandmother in the early 1900s, and carefully kept in my mother's trunk. The dress, my christening gown, is from 1930. The sleigh, a gift under the Christmas tree this year, is from two of my daughters.

Marion

REFLECTIONS ON MY DOLL

For one brief moment I tapped into...call it a divine connection, a higher consciousness, a creative source. I actually felt an attachment, like some invisible umbilical cord feeding me creation, a presence lovingly guiding my hands with a master teacher's gentle but firm touch. It wasn't I who created this face, these hands. They were created through me. My intellect, my ego, had no part in this reality. Something, some energy was guiding me, helping me to mould the clay. My hands knew exactly what to do to uncover, to unmask the doll from this

block of wet earth. As I refined the features, scraping away the excess, the unnecessary, I worked into the late hours of the night, oblivious of time, so focused was I on revealing my doll, never wavering from the task. My whole being was completely absorbed in this creation. Never have I lived the present moment so fully. And just as swiftly as it came it was gone, this creative connection, this guidance. I've yet to capture its essence again.

Carole





HANDS

I am sculpting hands with the clay today, and I am aware of how little I have observed my body. In sculpting hands it is surprising, all the small details that you do not see even though you see your hands every day. I am noticing the differences in hands of all ages, whether they are the chubby hands of a baby or the gnarled hands of an older person. I am becoming reacquainted with myself.

Workshop Participant



Doll by Sonya

SHAPING

Working with a clump of clay, I am aware that I can create something from nothing. The shaping of the first foot went smoothly and was very much like a child's foot. The second foot, however, was much larger, wider and taller, when I compared them an hour later. While I am aware of symmetry, duplication is not the essence of what this is about, rather it is creation that is precious and at the same time, complex.

Myrna



AWAKENING

There was something about working with the clay, with heightened senses, that quieted me. I left the linear movement of time to travel inward – a slow, circular, rhythmic journey. What followed was a profound awakening. I came to an awareness of parts of myself that had never been exposed to light, an awakening to silence and stillness. I entered a place where I might simply experience – bring forth what I am and what I might be.

Terry



WHAT PARTICIPANTS SAID WHILE SCULPTING A DOLL

On Inner Beauty

Sculpting has awakened my creative sensibilities. As our pieces grow in front of us, they teach us that we all grow slowly into who we are today. Sculpting teaches us about our inner being. Its calming effect gives us a sense of quietness and solitude that we deserve. As I look at the beauty of our sculptures, I can see the beauty within myself and others.

On Change

As I sculpt I have discovered how quickly a piece can change. The goals I had in mind at the beginning can change as quickly as life itself. I can mould the clay to become whatever I would like, and I can also change whatever I don't like. I think that the process of sculpting can be a metaphor for life experiences. If we can make changes to our sculpture to improve or make it better, we can change or enhance our lives in some way for the same reasons. Sometimes it takes a little while to recognize that we need to make a change, but when we finally come to this realization and make a modification, we feel fulfilled or satisfied, and our lives become more whole, like our sculptures.

PIXIE

"Pixie" comes running towards me, her hands holding a gift of flowers. She brings other gifts too, for she has helped me loosen the bonds that I have had around my creativity. She has also come to show me how to be truly who I am, and to accept myself in all ways of my being. I suspect she will continue to enlighten me, as I explore the child within and the feelings of joy and love that are part of the creative process.

Anne



GETTING IN TOUCH

We have not forgotten the dolls
of our childhoods, the Eaton Beauty
preserved in cedar chests or linen closets,
the Barbara Anne Scott donated to a museum
in Winnipeg. Dismembered dolls we loved
too much to throw away, buried in shoe boxes
beneath poplars we once climbed.
We remember them as we peacefully paint
the porcelain hands and faces of baby dolls,
long after our children have grown and
put their own away. We remember Kupie dolls
elastics that broke, the rubber doll that melted
when we placed it in the oven of the woodstove
to keep warm,
the Fairy Doll with silver wings bought with seven
Shillings earned by doing chores for the shopkeeper.
Baby Wetums with her own bottle
and a hole in her bottom. Tressy with thick
blond hair that grew from the middle of her head
when you pressed a button on her tummy.
Our own hair is just beginning to grow back
after chemo, more slowly than Tressy,
but each week we look more like ourselves.
We have not forgotten the names of our dolls:
Susan Isabel, Caroline with pierced pearls
that turned her ears green, Inez, Baby Ella, Mary
in a wedding dress of net. The dolls we cradle now
in embroidered sundresses we wore to our weddings
in the 60's, our children's first christening gowns,
have names like Hope or Faith, Armany meaning trust.
They hold in their soft bodies prayers for courage,
strength, optimism, hope, peace of mind.
Remind us of the girl children we once were,
delighting in a blue metal doll carriage on Christmas Eve,
the vinyl smell of a new doll Christmas morning,
living in the now. They symbolize the child within us
we minister to so she can live and grow.
As we rock these fragile dolls we created so lovingly,
it is ourselves we heal and comfort.

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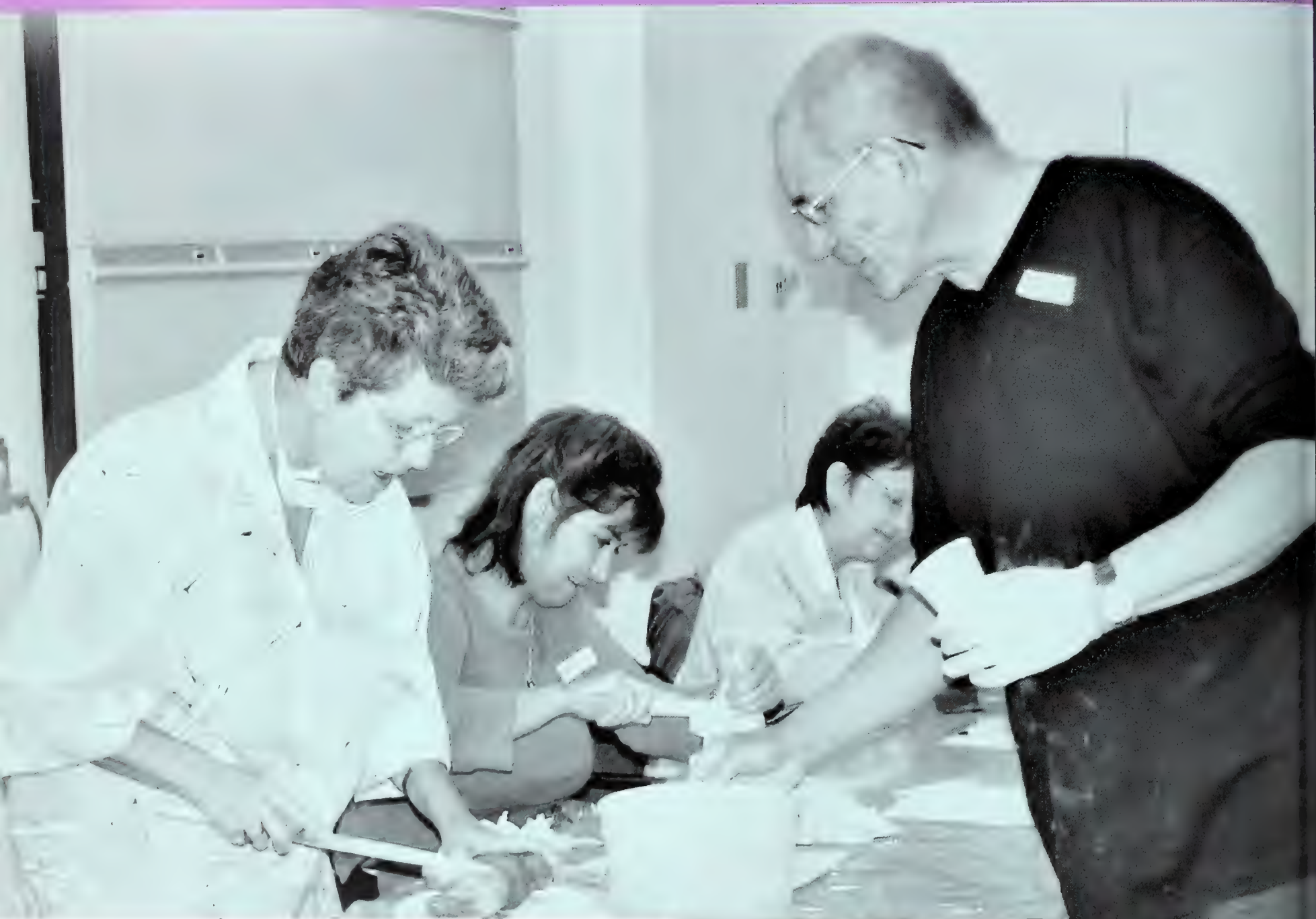


CREATIVE CHILD

Children explore life in a carefree way. Creativity requires this carefree-ness and spontaneity. Creativity has no path, it just happens as you continue the project or task. One must be able to pause and turn at any point. As a child, you do exactly this all day long. It is adults who make children conform or restrict their movement. When adults are uncomfortable with spontaneity, children in their care are unable to challenge this. Hence, I think those children lose their sense of creativity. Children who are taught through art, play, games and music will be at one with their creative capabilities.

Debbie

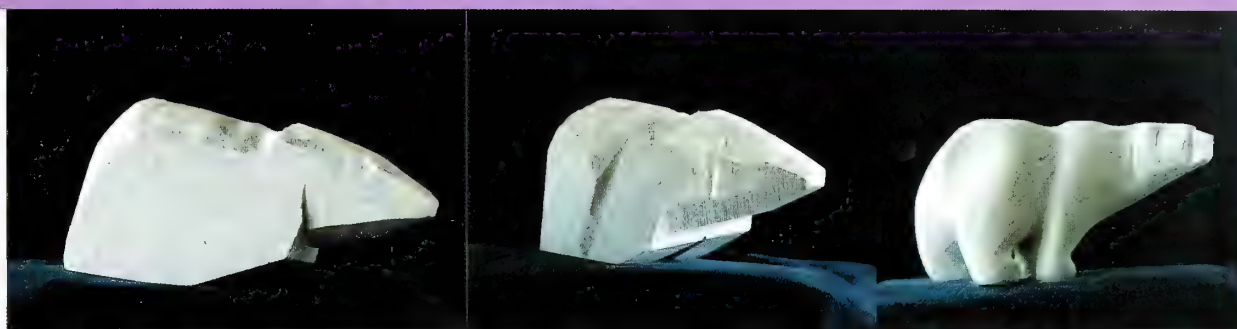
Soapstone Carving



Soapstone carving has developed into one of our premiere art classes. The soapstone comes from all over the world. Saws, rasps and files are used to slowly shape the rough-cut stone blocks. Then, the smooth-as-glass polish comes from long hours of sandpaper finishing, starting with 180- and ending with 900-grit papers.

As we work with the stone, its colours and markings emerge, often to our surprise and awe. During the carving process, the colours in the stone are often hidden under a greyish shadow of stone dust. A final bath, in water and then tung oil, reveals the depth and variety of the stone's markings.





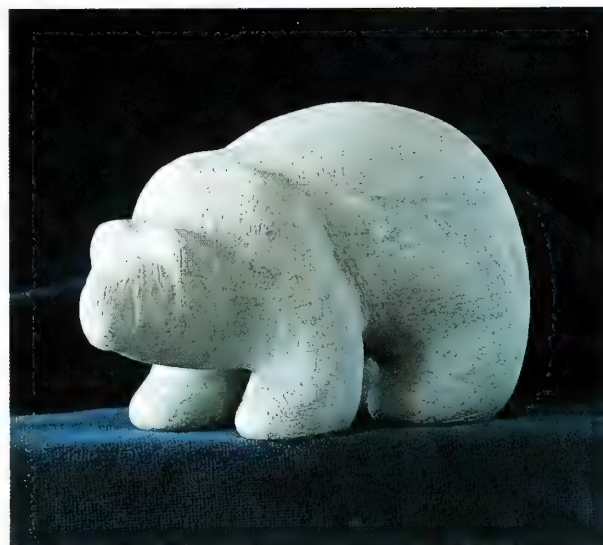
WHAT PARTICIPANTS SAID WHILE CARVING

On Magic

Carving a bear is a magical process. Each one of us started with a plain piece of grey stone, and after six weeks each person had a beautiful, smoothly polished bear with its own distinct shape, colouring and character.

On Chiselling

Soapstone is a new skill and in a way is equal to my new approach to life. I was hit with a curve in the first class, because I had my own image of what I wanted to carve. Instead, I was faced with the "roughed out" shape of a bear. Just like I was hit with and had to face cancer. I worked through many feelings as I carved. Who could guess one could learn so much from a piece of stone!



SPIRIT OF THE BEAR

Spirit of the Bear
Come to me
and share your strength
Dance with me
in my inner dreams
Show me my courage
To race to the stars
And yet the strength
of my stillness
Spirit of the Bear
Thank you.

Elizabeth



When one helps others, all are strong.

CARVING LESSONS

I learned some lessons while carving this bear. When I review them I see they are the lessons of the cancer journey.

- Start with the big picture.
- Carve away the excess. Less is more.
- Do some experimenting.
- Relax and be patient.
- Be open to what emerges.
- Use the right tools.
- There are no mistakes.
- Dig through the different levels.
- Know when to ask for help from the master.
- Ask for input from fellow students.
- Indecision happens and it's okay.
- Curiosity is ever present. What will this bear look like?
- I am centred and focused while carving the bear. An inner peace settles over me.
- I am saying something through this piece, something to do with leaving a legacy, making heirlooms. This is an investment in my future, something for those I will someday leave behind.
- The stone has permanence. So do I. My spirit is permanent.

Darlene



Bear by Curly

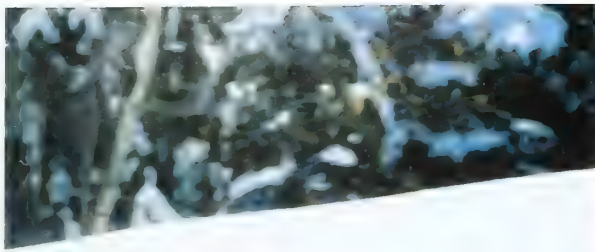
INTENTION

I wonder what the bear thinks as I am carving her. I think of what cancer is like. I choose to think of cancer as destructive, disorganized, chaotic and dysfunctional. I will not give it power over me. It is not strong and it does not have intention.

This bear has intention. You can see it in her movement. She is strong, powerful, substantial, centred, focused. I sense that she is about to do something.

I, too, have intention. I will focus on making my body cancer-free and protecting the normal cells. I will be disciplined about my diet and exercise. I will nourish my mind and spirit, in addition to my body. I am convinced that the treatment of cancer involves all three pieces, not only treatment of the physical body. I intend to be cancer-free.

Darlene



RELUCTANCE

Reluctance is only four weeks old and now is looking like a bear. Just like a newborn of any species, it takes a while to develop. As the crafter of Reluctance, I have become enthusiastic about carving each week, along with the other carvers. We chat, mingle and learn of one another's lives and families. We often talk about what we go through every day with cancer treatment.

Carving has prompted me to tackle other projects that seemed overwhelming before. Now I can achieve things like fixing household items. I am looking forward to returning to my hobby of woodwork. I also want to do more carving of soapstone in the future. The neatest thing is the variation and patterns in the stone. I observed each bear as it progressed, with the carver shaping the stone to complement the pattern. It is almost like the bears wanted to come alive!

I had "show and tell" with my family and friends. They were impressed. They had not realized any artistic side of me before. I have enjoyed building willow furniture, but this is different. This is "internal work." We are all expressing ourselves. We're on the same road walking side by side.

Norman



SOLID AS ROCK

Holding the bear, caressing it and treasuring it, it is more than one just feels it. As you work with your hands around the bear, you can feel where it's just not quite the right shape. In the first class I looked at all the pieces of soapstone. Everyone had a chance to look over the crudely cut pieces and choose one that they would carve. It came to me, the piece came to me, it Picked Me! Week after week, the bear's features took shape before my very eyes. I'd get excited. I wanted to know how it would turn out.

I guess it can be applied to our own life with each day that passes. It's like the rasp or file passing across the bear's back or side, giving shape to the characteristics that make it unique. Our life becomes much like the process of carving the bear. Slowly our lives are shaped into what we are today. Solid as Rock!

There is an excitement within me to see what can be accomplished. It amazes me how the soapstone can come to life, by using the proper tools. Just like through the process of carving, I can shape my life into something beautiful.

Doug

GRACE

He is not finished. He needs more work. A work in progress – like life. He slowly comes out to show his shape and colour. He is not perfect nor will he ever be – like me! But he is beautiful and with time he will come to show more beauty. More and more I know that life is a gift. I can think of the glass as half empty or half full. I choose half full. I can still dance in the daffodils as the sun shines. I seek the joys and the graces.

Peggy

PEACEFUL BEAR

For me, the carving process was completely engrossing. It was like visiting an island of calm for a couple of hours every week. The finished bear is smooth and cool to touch – the polished stone has a peaceful glow, like water in a deep lake.

Lorraine





Carving by Sylvia



Carving by Bill

AMAH, MY FRIEND

When I began to carve my bear, little did I know how serious my attachment to this piece of stone would become. As time passed, my bear became alive before my eyes and a strong friendship was formed. I then decided the name of my bear should sound like "Amah", which means friend. Amah has become someone with whom I can confide in a personal way. He never criticizes, but he will always listen with patience and understanding, no matter what the topic. Whenever I look at Amah I feel a sense of peacefulness, and know that irrespective of what the future may hold, he will always be there to assist and guide me. I shall always treasure Amah, my friend.

John

STOPPING TRAFFIC

I see parts of myself in the bear as he is being created through my hands. I see solid footing not only within the bear, but within myself. His head is stretched out and so is mine, as I reach out to the future. He looks as if he is moving forward and so am I. My thoughts go to the words of 13th-century Sufi poet and mystic Rumi, as he asks, "Who am I standing in the midst of all this thought traffic?" My thought traffic, my self-talk is busy, busy, busy. This makes me aware that there are many times I feel I need some stop lights!

Wendy



GETTING MY BEARINGS

Two gigantic bears roam the night sky: Ursa Major and Ursa Minor, also known as the Big Bear and the Little Bear. Most people know them as the Big and Little Dipper. In times past, before GPS, people looked to the heavens for directions. This was navigation by the stars.

The phrase “getting your bearings” comes from sailors as they practiced using the Big Bear to find Polaris, the North Star. It is part of the tail of the Little Bear, brightest star in the heavens, and seemingly unmoving.

I decided to name my bear after Polaris, the North Star. This seemed to fit my journey of healing. After the suffering I felt in mind, body and spirit upon being diagnosed with cancer, I liked the idea and the image of my own powerful celestial being. The feeling of carving, coaxing and smoothing my bear, this symbol of strength and power, was satisfying.

May those who find themselves lost or alone or without a path in a frightening wilderness, discover their own bear. May we all reconnect with our own strength and power.

Linda



FREDERICK GEORGE

I have enjoyed making this bear immensely. I am so proud of this bear and will cherish it, putting it in a special place in our home as a reminder of what I can accomplish. One of the things I’ve learned in carving my bear has been how to get back my sense of joy, and also that my life no longer has to be perfect for me to be fully happy.

The main insight I have gained, though, is a deeply cherished one. As I was making my bear it occurred to me that he needed a name. I thought about the challenges I had gone through growing up with a mentally ill father. As a young child I had loved and adored my dad. But as I grew older I felt no love for him at all. Eventually, I went into therapy and learned for the first time how to understand my father’s illness and later to forgive. It was only while looking for a name for my bear that I realized there was another step in the whole emotional healing process around my dad. It had to do with loving. Here was a man unloved by all those around him for most of his life because of his illness. He deserved to be loved and I realized I wanted to send him love and learn to love him now. So I named my bear after him, Frederick George.

Heather

WHAT PARTICIPANTS SAID WHILE CARVING

On Slowing Down

When cancer strikes, it can give us time to slow down. In each of our classes we talk about our own process in carving the bear. Each time I do that I learn something new about the process or myself. I realize that I could do this with anything in my life, whether it is gardening, drawing, making dinner, or washing dishes. Everything we do in a day has the potential to help us learn about ourselves.

On Balance

There are a lot of losses with an illness like cancer. It is nice to find that with those losses we also gain something, which is to go deeper into creativity...to create something that we never thought we'd be able to create...or that we've always wanted to do but never had the time to do. Creativity offers us the balance, that positive side. It's nice to balance all those losses with the positive.

On Pain

While I am creating I forget my troubles, and I also think it helps with pain. I think people in pain get so involved in what they are doing that they actually forget the pain for a little while. Whether it is physical, mental or emotional pain, it's just gone. This is an interesting learning, because if you can do it in a class for an hour or two you can take that learning home with you and say to yourself, if I can forget it there, what can I do with my creativity at home to find that same feeling.

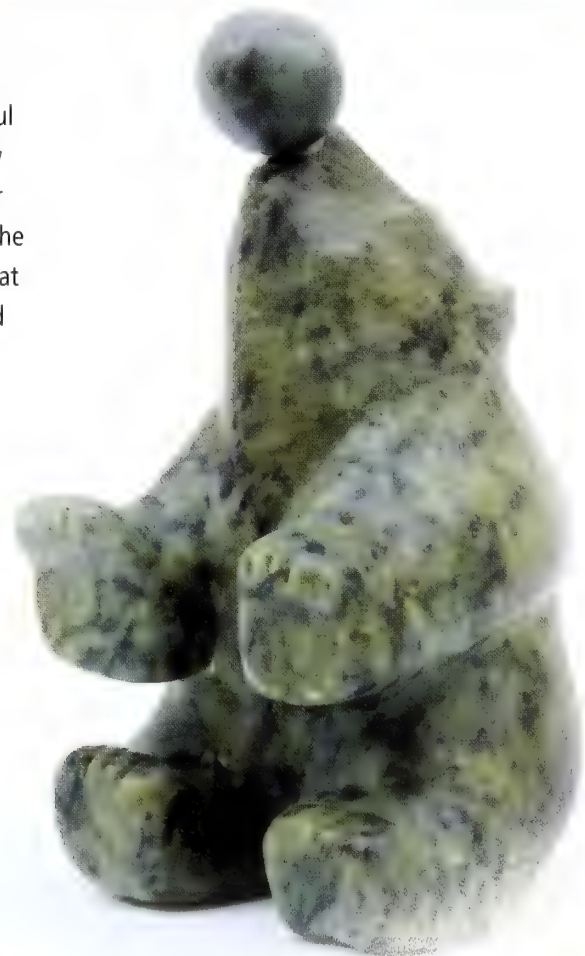
Anything that enhances health...and I think creativity very much enhances health...it enhances life and anything that makes us feel positive about life and makes us want to go forward into life, is certainly part of the circle.



BOO BOO

Boo Boo is like my five-year-old daughter Cassidy. She's cuddly, she's fun, she's playful and she's showing us all how she can balance a ball on her nose. The ball is her world. She may have to balance it soon at much too young an age. God willing, I hope she won't.

Susan





Carvings by Lorraine

LORRAINE'S BEARS – WOMAN OF COURAGE

For the inner healing to occur and the anger to subside I must get back to my roots and engage in something I enjoyed in my childhood. I was given this advice after being diagnosed with cancer. But, I was angry. Why hadn't the cancer been discovered earlier? Why didn't they tell me that when they say "terminal" they simply mean they haven't found a cure yet? Why me? That was over two and a half years ago. I fought back, and this is my story.

"Back to my childhood, back to my roots," what could this possibly mean? The words kept repeating over and over in my mind. I had sold everything and moved back home. I had tried various creative outlets to express myself, but nothing brought me any sense of peace.

Carving soapstone sparked my passion. Then it all made sense. Carving took me right back to my childhood. I had grown up on a farm. A hammer and a saw in my hands, the feel of a rasp, chisel and files, all returned me to the familiarity of my childhood. It brought back the self-reliance (backbone) I felt as a child. And with it, I discovered the psychological intervention that helped boost my sense of optimism and my ability to cope more effectively with my cancer.

My passion was rekindled. Carving became my meeting place with peace, serenity and sanity. Enthusiasm enveloped my life. For the first time in ages, I felt in control of the situation. To take a rigid hunk of rock, manipulate it and watch it transform into a meaningful shape, seemed to equate to my life's journey. I was beginning to grab hold of each of my fears and my anger and give them meaning in my life. When I carved, I found a world where neither fear nor anger existed. I was grounded again.



The Angry Bear, roaring with its teeth bared, was my first carving. It symbolized the anger I felt when no one seemed to listen to my words of concern. I was inspired. Seven more bears followed. I named my bears, and each one represents a portion of my journey. "Knocked on My Butt," "Cry One Tear," "Bed Ridden," "Rejoice," "Prayer," "Kick Butt" and "Stand Firm," soon became the products of my transition. Each signified a new step. "Cry One Tear" represented the time I needed to stay peaceful and soft. The "Rejoicing Bear" portrays the time when I realized that it doesn't matter what you look like, sometimes you just have to dance, rejoice and do your own thing. "Kick Butt" epitomizes those times when we must stand up, be firm and fight back.

The power of carving comes from the process. When I sit on my balcony carving for hours on end, I reflect on my personal growth. Lorraine means a "woman of courage." The bear is the symbol of healing, protection and power. The bears and I are a natural blend. They reflect a fighting spirit we both share. When each bear "to be" was merely a rough rock waiting for me to begin the carving process, and through the many hours of work needed for each bear to come forth, there is a passage that parallels my journey with cancer. My journey continues with each new bear I create and each new challenge that I meet.

Lorraine



*When a tear drops,
a heart is touched.*

LIFEFLIEFIEL

I would like to introduce my special bear, "LIFEFLIEFIEL," who has been created over the last six weeks. While working on him, I have drawn many analogies to my current experience of living with cancer.

Bears climb mountains and, periodically, I have had feelings of climbing the mountain of cancer. The stone came from within the earth, just as cancer has come from within my own body. When I looked at the block of stone, I did not know how I was going to shape a bear, just as at first, I did not know how I was going to deal with my cancer. Carving the stone was a big deal, just as having cancer is the BIG DEAL! Both experiences have been like hibernation. My bear has emerged from being locked within the stone and I am emerging from a winter of diagnosis and treatment of my cancer.

As I chipped away at the block of stone, I have also been chipping away at this experience of cancer. I have found myself not only getting to the heart and soul of the bear, but also getting more to my own heart and soul. At first, the block of stone was rather ugly (although it did have a beauty of its own), just as the diagnosis of cancer was ugly to hear. I had a sense of relief when I learned how the bear would take shape and how my journey with cancer would unfold. Beauty has emerged from the stone as I have cut, chipped and filed to create the features of my bear. When I washed the bear, I was excited and surprised to see the beauty of the rock emerging. My own body was cut during surgery and since; some beauty has emerged as I have worked through the journey of dealing with my cancer.

Just as I have refined the shape of the bear, I continue to refine my own perspective on having cancer by reading, talking and taking part in activities like the soapstone workshop and choir. Polishing my bear at this point is just like polishing my life.

Lifefliefiel is solid, strong, looking forward and sure-footed. I too feel solid, strong, looking forward and sure-footed about where I am headed with my treatments and the future. As I relate to my bear, I have found myself also relating more to others in this journey – other cancer patients, friends and family. I have a sense of pride in my bear just as I have a sense of pride in how I am dealing with my cancer. My bear is being brought to life just as I feel at times that I am renewing my own life.

Peggy



Soapstone Hearts by Sandy



SURVIVORS

My wife is a cancer survivor and I am her support. I enrolled in the Arts in Medicine class so that she would not be alone. At first I felt a little uncomfortable because I was not suffering like other members of the class, but I was determined to remain at my wife's side. It didn't take long until I felt a part of the carving group.

My carving represents the old and the new. The father bear protects his offspring. At first I referred to the large bear as she, but soon I realized that it really symbolized my role. I feel like the father bear when it comes to my family and now in later life my sole concern is my wife and her struggles with cancer.

The old and the new represent significant challenges and change that have occurred in our personal life. I'm now a part-time housewife. Managing the chores and running the house had always been my wife's task and this was a very unfamiliar role for me. I still need her direction and her opinion about what must be done, but I am learning. My attempts sometimes lead to some "serious discussions." She wants everything to be ship-shape, because that's what she would

do. She desperately longs to be able to take back the role she has always had. When I observe the pain in her eyes, I am determined to try even harder. Times have changed and we are adapting.

Like the father bear, I prefer to handle the heavier tasks in order to protect my wife. I still have a hard time comprehending her emotional problems and I worry about creating additional injury to her sense of self. I gaze at the father bear and wonder how he would respond.

The baby bear represents new life, a new beginning that promises a tomorrow filled with hope for the future, peace and contentment. I call my baby bear "Elunun," the native word for Hope.

John

WHAT PARTICIPANTS SAID WHILE CARVING

On Shaping

Day by day, we're shaping our lives. Cancer takes away so much, but through creativity there seems to be a giving back to oneself. When I create something, it will be here forever. It is important to leave a part of myself. It's what we do with our lives. We leave something there, a little piece of "you."

On Expression

Having something like cancer is difficult. It has given me a different direction. The sculpting and soapstone carving has allowed me to express my experience. I never thought I could be an artist. Sharing this work with other people has been rewarding.

On Slowing Down

Carving soapstone is a slow process, a slowing down, and a slowing down in life. We are all in such a busy state. Doing this takes time. Slowing down and watching the piece come together is calming.

On Coping

Carving a bear has given me a sense of accomplishment that comes from learning new skills. The struggle to learn, assimilate and conquer a novel art form resembles the struggle of learning to live with cancer. This is quite a departure from other ways of coping.



Carving by Bill

On Perspective

I recall one carving class when the soapstone instructor was helping a lady who was having difficulty shaping a leg on her bear. I overheard him say, "If you only focus on this one leg, you'll have to build the whole bear around it." Later, we talked about our experience during the class and I was able to share my insight; when cancer becomes the sole focal point in one's life, everything else seems to be built around the cancer. It was important for me to focus on the reality that even though cancer may appear to consume all of our life, it is really only a part of one's life.

On the Creative Spark

Creating has helped me connect with a latent part of myself. I'd never done anything creative before. I was always very dismissive of anything that did not have academic merit. In the last three weeks as I have carved a bear a new spark has been generated from within.



THE SIGN OF INTELLIGENT LIFE?

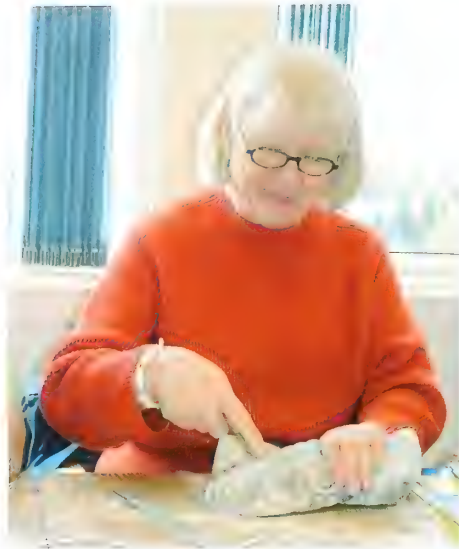
I recall the first time I came to a soapstone carving class two years ago. I could barely stop crying. A friend escorted me. How would I ever be able to handle the chisels, files and rasps to sculpt a bear from soapstone? My fingers and nail beds were sore from the effects of chemotherapy, my arms and wrists weak from surgery and...everything else! But I started.

A few weeks later I noticed a perfume advertisement; perfume ads tell us many interesting things if we care to decipher them! This one shows a stone broken open to reveal a bottle of perfume bearing the sign of Pi, the 16th letter of the Greek alphabet, along with the statement, "a sign of intelligent life." I kept looking at the ad and even put it up on my bathroom mirror.

Much later I went back for a second level of carving classes. I decided I wanted to try to sculpt the broken open stone, revealing the mystery of Pi, releasing the fragrance of intelligent life. I recently discovered that Oscar Wilde had said, "Life breaks open everybody." This helps me remember that I am not alone. We are all shocked by Life. It's part of what I call our "acute humanity."

Isn't it interesting that the word "optimism" literally means "to work," "to produce in abundance" and "to bring forth." Certainly there is much work to do in living through a cancer experience. Not the least of which is birthing images that run through us. It is, after all, the images that draw us to a more coherent wholeness. We know that all organisms, right down to individual cells, are both creators and perceivers of patterns; it is this inner authority that keeps us gathering ourselves into a unity...not only here and now but also with reference to other places and times. This involves us in appreciating those timeless and eternal values that are inherent in the coherence of a living system. It is easy to forget this in our technological age. It has often been difficult to remember this when I have felt very ill. But more and more I recognize the need to say "no" to that which destroys the dynamic and evolving wholeness of life/death. It is our need to create that is the sign of intelligent life.

Evangeline



SURVIVAL

I was born in a logging camp in the mountains of British Columbia, rocky and heavily treed – a true Taurus tied to the earth. The mountains and all they hold still represent shelter, peace and serenity to me. As a small child I was constantly bringing home rocks and old bones to add to my “collections” – putting them where I could see them and touch them. I still collect these and always have them around me. I usually carry a small smooth stone (my worry bead). These once-living pieces speak to me of survival and continuity.

When we first looked at the soapstone pieces set out for us to choose, I looked at this oddly shaped piece that appeared to have a spine embedded in it – a fossilized one, broken but still surviving – still strong. The spine has great personal meaning to me. It means having “backbone,” control, endurance, determination and courage, and it signifies how I want to stay strong.

The pieces of stone remained unchanged until we started to put our “signatures” on them through the carving process. As I carved and sanded and polished my stone, it represented the working and reworking of my self. Whether I wanted it to or not, as I worked with the stone, it began to tell me things about myself.

The spine of the fish came forth towards the end, and represented itself as life, hope and wisdom. It is somewhat like a book that sits with only its spine and cover showing, until you open up the pages and the story begins to unfold. Once it is written it remains. I call my piece “Survival.”

Tanny



MOTHER AND CHILD

I am a cancer survivor. A couple of years ago I was diagnosed with thyroid cancer, then three months later, breast cancer. Although the journey has been a long, rough and dusty road, I have been fortunate to be able to tap into my creativity. "Mother and Child" became symbolic to me and gave me more reason to focus on the positives in my life. Throughout all the sharing, the support, the tears, the laughter, I began to realize that although the journey was not yet over, I indeed could see some of the rough edges being smoothed. As I chiselled, sawed, chopped, sanded and buffed "Mother and Child," I could see the form taking shape. "Mother and Child" became very symbolic for me. It became easier for me to put a smile on their faces and, in turn, a smile on mine. I realized that I was capable of standing tall and had the renewed courage to see this through. Life continually teaches me.

Sandra





THE STORY OF CALICO

Here is Calico. I only decided on my cat's name as it was polished. With all its different colours and spots, the name Calico came to mind. When we were asked to think about what project we wanted to do, I found myself not having a clear focus of how to carve this cat. I think back to all of our classes and I remember frustration. This was a challenging and difficult piece. I think about this last statement and I realize it was not only soapstone carving that was challenging and frustrating – this has been reflective of my life's story!

Living with cancer for nearly twenty-three years has been a challenge. In the first decade, every eighteen months or so my oncologist told me the cancer was back and I needed to be treated. Each time I felt as though I moved one step forward and two steps backward. The frustration with my health was consuming. In effect my health was keeping me from advancing with my education.

For the first fifteen years I always thought I was finally cured after every treatment. This gave me the motivation to complete my first university degree, partake in part-time employment and then complete a second degree. Working as a dietician was something I aspired to from the first nutrition class. Possibly this yearning for knowledge in this particular field was a result of having cancer and thus the desire to improve my own health.

Just as I am impressed with the final result of Calico, I too am impressed with my accomplishments working in my own home-based dietetic counselling business – a career I love and I am passionate about as I see how much difference it has made in my own life. I finally have started to live, enjoying each and every day, a joy I likely would not have found except that my oncologist told me that he cannot cure me and I need to do the things that are important to me. This was the wake-up call I really needed!!!

Connie

SEAL

I was given a choice of many shapes and sizes of soapstone. Each stone was unique. As cancer survivors we each have our own story, as does the piece of stone. I had an image of what I wanted to carve – a bird, a whale or a seal. There was one piece of soapstone that I knew would lend itself to becoming a seal.

Initially I was intimidated to see this chunk of rough rock and the need to decide where and how to begin. There is a parallel to when I was first told I had cancer: Where do I begin? What are my options? How will I go about finding the answers to all my questions? Will I survive? What will I look like after surgery?

As I started chipping away the rough edges on my stone, I could relate to my cancer being chipped away. The diagnosis...the rough stone waiting to be handled with loving hands...the surgery...chipping away at the piece of soapstone...the radiation...chip, chip, chip...things are beginning to take shape and I see and feel the changes. Would my life become smoother like my stone? After radiation, the healing process started. My seal was beginning to look like a seal. I treated it gently as I sanded, oiled and polished it to completion.

My seal is now complete. The rough edges are gone and the stone is sleek and shiny. The seal will glide through the water smoothly and the water will run off its oiled back. I too am becoming complete and it is time for me to glide through life more effortlessly.

It has been a rough road. I have had to learn that I will not be able to go back to my life before cancer. My life has changed. I have changed. There are many annoying reminders of my brush with cancer, yet I am learning to accept the limits of my life and I am determined to survive whatever comes my way. I am now graciously accepting the fact that I am a cancer survivor.

Norma



PEACE ARCH

The cold winds of January chilled my bones, but within me, my heart warmed. I was ecstatic to be returning to the carving room. Anger and depression had taken over my life and the experience of carving had given me an opportunity to focus on something other than myself. My bear was the beginning and I longed again for a feeling of accomplishment. I was ready for a new challenge.

Cancer has no boundaries. The class included the young, middle aged and seniors. Part of the strength of the carving experience is the bonding of the group created by the discussion, sharing our private thoughts and the difficulties we have encountered. The tears, laughter and sharing intertwines us all into a cohesive and supportive unit. Our instructor gave us the opportunity to choose a piece of soapstone that eventually would become a masterpiece symbolizing a significant part of our journey. I felt like I was home again.

In the days that followed I spent countless hours scanning magazines and books, trying to decide what to create. Lying in bed one evening, my thoughts turned to the patients, their families and all those who helped with the cancer treatments. My inspiration was that I wanted to carve a Peace Arch with a dove inside the arch, as a tribute to all who have passed through this cancer centre.

Armed with a collection of pictures, I arrived at class prepared to take up the challenge. Choosing the perfect dove to express my feelings would not be an easy task. With the help of Dr. Marilyn, we decided on the easiest picture, the one with the dove's wings reaching out. Under Allan's guidance, I agreed to try. As I chiselled and filed the stone, my vision of the Peace Arch started to become a reality.

I remember vividly a day in early April. My stone was beginning to take shape and I was pleased with the accomplishment. As I spent time wandering the lobby of the cancer clinic waiting for my husband John to pick me up, my eyes were riveted to the front entrance of the building. Much to my surprise, I noticed that every entrance in the building was framed with an arch. The peace arch was just like the one in my carving. I was dumbfounded.

I have come to realize that within the walls of the clinic are helping hands reaching out to guide us. Like the dove, we use these hands or wings to reach out and take flight, seeking peace and hopefully the cure for our disease. I have travelled through many different stages. There have been thunderclouds and driving rain; there have been rainbows that make me realize there is hope. Our own spirituality envelops and guides us, each in our own way. Let our wings take us safely on our journey and may we be victorious in our battles.

While chiselling at the stone, I had a vision. There was a beautiful mountain with dark clouds billowing around the top. As my hands moved over the smooth surface of my carving, the clouds disappeared, leaving only a golden sky. My thoughts moved to a song I could hear ringing in my memory. It is a song that reminds us to have faith. The music is written by Rodgers and Hammerstein and is from the musical *Carousel*. The words go like this:

When you walk through a storm
Hold your head up high
And don't be afraid of the dark.
At the end of the storm
Is a golden sky
And the sweet silver song of a lark.
Walk on through the wind,
Walk on through the rain,
Though your dreams be tossed and blown.
Walk on, walk on with hope in your heart
And you'll never walk alone,
You'll never walk alone.*

We had that music hidden away somewhere and I needed to find it. John found the record tucked away in the garage. We put it on the record player, danced like we were teenagers again, and remembered, so many memories, such peace and so much hope.

Thelma

* From "You'll Never Walk Alone," by Richard Rodgers & Oscar Hammerstein II
© 1945 by Williams Music. (Used with permission)



Music

As we gathered the artwork and stories for this book, we noticed that music was a recurring theme. Whether it is there in the background, helping us to relax or let go of distracting thoughts, or in the foreground, the source of our passion and creative expression, music can play a powerful role in healing.

Music can be a highly portable form of creative expression, needing no equipment: a melody playing in your head or a tune that you hum almost without thinking. In other cases, instruments, a concert hall and an appreciative audience are required. Arts in Medicine classes often begin with a period of quiet meditation using a guided imagery or inspiring music. A choir also meets regularly throughout the year. Volunteers, health care professionals and patients are all invited to join.



MY FATHER'S PIANO

My mother created beauty in our home through her gardening, while my father, who was a family physician in rural Oklahoma, had a life-long passion for music. In his childhood, in Florida, he used to sneak into the concert hall at his boarding school at night to practise on the school's grand piano. He often told us of his memories as a medical student in Chicago, when he went to hear the great Rachmaninoff perform the Third Piano Concerto.

In the late 1940s, my father realized one of his dreams, when he purchased a 1920 Steinway parlour grand piano. I grew up with that piano. It sat in our living room for over forty years and appears in hundreds of photographs of family celebrations – birthdays, holidays, wedding receptions and parties. My father played almost every day, usually early in the morning or late at night, whenever he could find time away from his medical practice.

As he grew older, he was no longer able to see the music, but would sit at his piano with an elderly black cat in his lap, gently playing music that he knew by heart. My father died just short of his ninetieth birthday, of prostate cancer. He spent his final few months bedridden, but even then asked my brother to play for him in the evening. He could hear the music from his bedroom and provided distant applause after every "performance," no matter how badly my brother played.

When my husband and I returned home for my father's funeral, we spent our first moments alone with him in the local funeral home, while my brother played the slow movement from Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata as beautifully as I have ever heard.

My mother died of leukemia a few years later and I inherited my father's piano, which had been neglected after his death and placed in storage in Texas. My husband and brother made arrangements for me to import the piano into Canada. The restoration, which took over two years, included sending the piano from Edmonton to Quebec for a new sounding board.

Today, my father's piano is once again a beautiful musical instrument. It sits in a place of honour in my home in Edmonton, and is a daily remembrance of my father and the extraordinary gift he gave to me – the love of music.

*Dr. Carol Cass
Director, Cross Cancer Institute*



Needlework by Lora

MUSIC MAKES MY SOUL DANCE

I have always turned to music to bring me up. I have had many days when my life was completely turned upside down. With my choice of music, it seemed as if a seed was planted and there was new growth once again. Music makes my soul dance. In sad moments when I need to cry, I can also turn to music for relief. Many times my heart has been in knots, and I now realize that music has been my main source for healing.

Workshop Participant

There must be a huge production of endorphins some-where in the process of singing beautiful music, because it is a positively transforming and transporting experience for me. I feel as if my immune system has been boosted 100-fold! The buzz of pure harmonics and the "high" you get through breath control also mitigates any pain or anxiety one feels as a result of treatment or just thinking about one's mortality. It is a truly magical experience.

Choir Member



Tile by Lorrie

PHENOMENAL WOMAN

I have learned the greatest lesson from composing the song for Maya Angelou's poem, "Phenomenal Woman," and performing it time and again. I have learned to truly understand the poem's message and internalize it.

Being a middle-aged woman in a youth-obsessed culture is hard; being a middle-aged woman in the youth-driven music business borders on the sadistic. The message in "Phenomenal Woman," however, has helped me to understand what fundamentally makes a person attractive. It is living your life with humour, respect, compassion and, above all, self-love. That is what creates the energy that draws people to you.

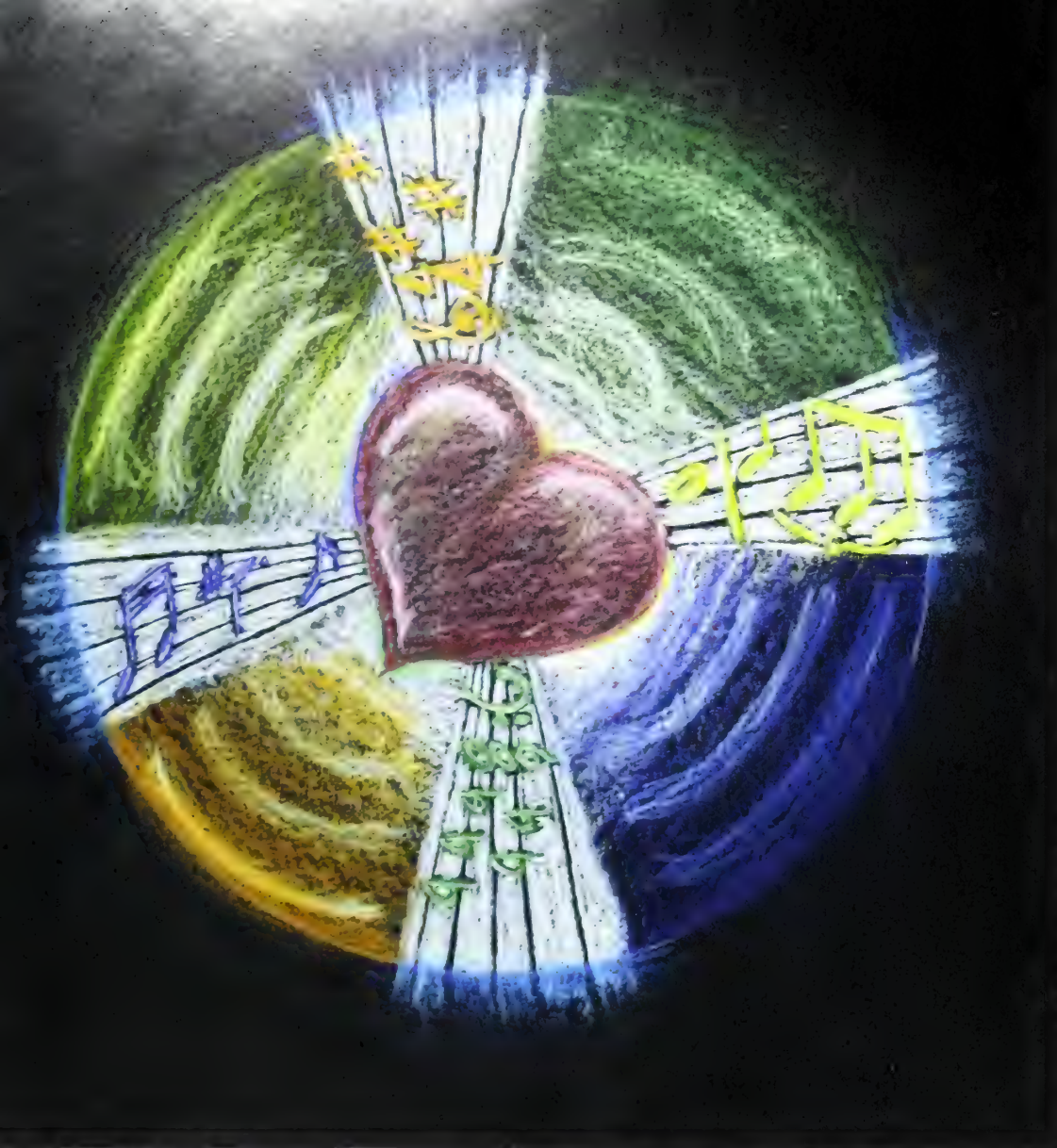
All of us, at times, struggle with low self-esteem. We obsess on the image we see in our bathroom mirror – in the harsh light of day, magnifying all physical imperfections and showing us a face full of fear and

judgment. We forget to look in the real mirror – the cosmic mirror, which reflects our true selves – with the eyes of those who love us.

My favourite performance of the song was in September 2003, when Dr. Angelou came to Toronto to speak to a crowd of 5,000 people, mostly women. I was asked to open the show. I felt the rush of recognition, not just of the song, but of the message of the evening – that we are all phenomenal for being exactly who we are.

When I came down off the stage, Maya was waiting backstage to go on. She embraced me and said, "You were born to sing that song!" And she is right. I am – and so are we all.

Amy Sky
Singer, songwriter



Mandala by Patricia

Anneke, a medical researcher diagnosed with ovarian cancer, had always held to a logical, rational view of life. As a researcher, her relationship with the world was often defined by her efforts to quantify it. However after a battery of tests confirmed the diagnosis, Anneke was faced with a very different sort of task from the one to which she had dedicated her working life.

Over the course of two years, her emotional healing took her in new, often unexpected directions. She began to rely more heavily on her intuition, learning to appreciate her own wisdom and listening more closely to her feelings and desires.

Parenting two sons and working fulltime routinely meant putting the needs of growing teenagers ahead of her own. As a loving parent, this came naturally to her. At the time of her cancer diagnosis, however, Anneke's sons were older and more independent, leaving her more free time than she was used to. She quickly set about putting it to good use.

For as long as she could remember, Anneke had wanted to play a wind instrument. She decided to act on this desire at long last, seeking out bands and orchestras where she could learn to make music in the company of others. All the tenor and alto saxophones had been chosen, so she settled on the clarinet.

She diligently practiced and took great satisfaction in the notes she blew. Sweet sounds, liquid feeling, flowing from deep inside. When she found herself hospitalized from complications of her disease, her music went with her. She always found the strength to play, even when she wasn't feeling well.

Anneke's inventiveness and creativity took her to another place the day she decided she wanted to play a concert. Without further ado, she picked up the phone and arranged to book the Zane Feldman Theatre for two hours that evening. Her son, a music student at McGill University, was home for summer break. He joined his mom in some duets: euphonium and clarinet. Her other son and his girlfriend joined them on stage, turning pages and giving wild applause as each piece ended.

Two hours of joy, music cascading over the theatre, connected them to each other, to the moment. Creating music together was a sacred event, a spur-of-the-moment thing to be cherished and remembered.

Creativity followed Anneke even into the last weeks of her life. Confined to bed, she continued to create. Gardening had always been a passion. Flowers gave her energy, and she loved them, patiently coaxing them up out of the ground, into wild splashes of colour. Into her bedroom, friends brought a birdbath filled with primrose and planted tulip bulbs, red, yellow, purple and orange spilling over the brim. The outdoors, indoors; a celebration of life and living. As Thoreau said, "To affect the day, that is the highest of the Arts."

Story told by M.J.H.

*It doesn't take much, sometimes,
to wave our own creative wands
over and through our lives and
the lives of others enriching and
beautifying our days and nights.*

MOZART AND CHOPIN: WEAPONS AGAINST CANCER

On May 1, 2002, sometime in the late afternoon, I went to the piano as I had done almost every day for the past forty-seven years and I started to play. This was no ordinary practice session. For one thing, my left arm was scarred with disfiguring burn marks and it was still sore from five weeks of radiation. For another, I knew that this could be my last opportunity to play the piano with two hands for years, maybe forever.

I had had time to mentally prepare for this day, so I was calm. But it was with deep emotion that I ran through some of my favourite pieces by Mozart, Beethoven, Chopin, Schumann, Ravel, Liszt and then back to Chopin – always Chopin! At the end, I played passages from the E-minor Concerto by Mozart and the slow movement of Chopin's B-minor Sonata, and then I gently closed the lid over the keys and left the room.

The next day I had a sarcoma containing a very rare form of cancer removed from my left arm. A major nerve was severed and sections of two muscles were removed. Reconstructive surgery was planned for a year later in a rare muscle transfer operation, in which a muscle from my back was stretched up and attached just under my shoulder. At the time, however, my surgeons believed that I would never perform professionally again.

Music continued to fill my life in some rather unusual ways. In the radiation room in the hospital, the technicians allowed me to play CDs over the loudspeaker, so I smiled through the traumatic (for me, as I am claustrophobic) experience. Three or four times that I was put into the MRI machine for periods of up to an hour, I survived because I played in my head, non-stop, the Chopin piano concertos, working them in detail and listening and isolating in my brain every last note.

I also took advantage of the fact that there had been masterpieces written for the left-handed pianist Paul Wittgenstein, who had lost his right arm in World War I. Being from a wealthy Austrian family, he had commissioned the leading composers of the day to create concertos for him – those by Ravel and Prokofiev are exceptional pieces of music and I saw no impediment to the fact that it was my left arm that was temporarily useless and not my right. So I boldly transcribed these two pieces for my right hand, pouring all my creative emotions into them and eventually performing them in concerts while I was still handicapped. The concerts were for me like a cosmic explosion of pent-up energy and passion; they were a godsend. On January 13, 2004, I was able to perform a full recital in Germany, again ending with my beloved Chopin B-minor Sonata. In July of that same year, I performed my equally beloved Mozart C-minor Concerto with the Suk Chamber Orchestra in Prague.



Tile by Jeff

Naturally there are many elements that contributed to my astounding recovery: genetics for sure, a healthy lifestyle, exceptional surgeons and, of course, my music and my husband Harry.

During these past three years, I have never been far from the beauty of the visual arts and most importantly, from my music. It was there every day in my head, in my afflicted body and in my soul. It kept my senses alive and my emotions fulfilled. It set an atmosphere in my life which simply can't entertain the thought of setback.

Janina Fialkowska

Classical concert pianist and recording artist

Officer of the Order of Canada

THE GIFT

Have you ever thought that every time a tragedy happens a gift from the past comes back to you, not in a monetary or material way, but truly in an engaging, spiritual way that gives our soul food, our bodies character and helps us be stronger?

With experiences of suffering, we build a new layer of protection to add to our knowledge base. This knowledge allows us to make better choices as we make decisions about how to live our lives. Striving to live well is a more onerous task than simply saying "I will just leave this alone or attend to it tomorrow." Maybe by leaving difficulties alone, we cheat ourselves of a layer of protection that didn't get applied, a new learning did not occur and insightfulness that failed to develop. Avoiding suffering might mean not acquiring the gift to pass on to someone else.

This past year, I have had a major tune-up in my life. The gifts I have received over my lifetime have seen me through, the gifts of each person who has in some way touched my life.

The gift arrives from the past to the present, as if passed along from one person to another. The gift is an adult who takes the time to listen to a child; it is the person who just smiles and says hello. It is a time when someone has the insight to know that something is not right and calls just to visit on the phone. It is a time when someone says they will pray for you. It is a time when a stranger trusts enough to give you a ride when they see the tiredness on your face.

Sometimes fear of the unknown prevents us from giving the gift. I remember saying to a waitress, "You seem sad," and she realized her sad face wasn't something someone wanted to see, so stern, so complacent. All of a sudden the ends of her mouth formed into a smile. I had passed on the gift. An old friend and I often go out for a meal. Whenever waiters have a name tag on, he makes sure he calls them by name and compliments them on their service. He gives the gift and my heart feels light.

When I was young I spent two years in grade six. I became rebellious, but there was Mrs. M. She stood on the step waiting for the last student to come into the school. That was always me. I wasn't a competent reader. She always made me come in to school fifteen minutes early and practice reading. I always thought it was punishment, but as I reflect back I realize it was a gift.

The gifts I have received are too endless to write about. I used to think, why me; now I think, why not me. I have these layers of protection and each person I meet seems to give me a gift. Every hug, every prayer, every kind word is stored so I can use it when I need a boost and when something bothers me

When I got the news of my cancer my life felt out of control and this was one more incident to add to my list of woes and despair. My gifts have seen me through and made me stronger. I vow to pass these gifts on to others, and in so doing I present a gift to myself.

Mary Jean



AFTERWORD

By Marilyn Hundleby

Dr. Marilyn Hundleby is a clinical psychologist in the Department of Psychosocial and Spiritual Resources at the Cross Cancer Institute in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. She is also Associate Clinical Professor, Department of Oncology at the University of Alberta, and Director, Arts in Medicine Program.

Dr. Hundleby began her work with the Cross Cancer Institute in 1990, when she was asked to facilitate supportive therapy groups for women diagnosed with breast cancer. Her greatest challenge in the beginning was to find effective ways to help these women express the complexity of their thoughts and feelings upon hearing the words "You have cancer." Observing the diversity and uniqueness of each person's experience, Marilyn began with simple "stick-man" drawings and visualization techniques as a means of helping each woman identify and verbalize her feelings. As her work continued, Marilyn experimented with more and more creative activities as a way to help individuals tap into their own healing power.



The magazine article left me spellbound. It was a cover story about a thirty-year-old woman in Ontario, Canada who was determined to defy the odds and survive cancer. She had been given only three months to live. It was October, 1990. After reading the article about Sherry Abbott, I was determined that

we would soon meet one another.

Our auditorium was filled with excitement as the lovely young woman in a chic navy suit slowly walked to the stage. For me the image is as vivid today as it was then. She carried an ebony cane, encrusted with rhinestones. It was one of the most elegant fashion accessories I had ever seen. Sherry requires the cane because of significant nerve damage to her spine and legs resulting from extensive surgery, chemotherapy and radiation treatment for ovarian cancer.

As I thought about her cane, I slowly came to understand its true significance. It was a form of personal expression: a creative statement from Sherry that allowed her to define herself in the manner she wished to be recognized. A situation that may have made us feel awkward, watching a vibrant young woman using a cane, instead radiated confidence with a glow that filled the room. Sherry had added a creative spin to her personal situation, and in essence had discovered a way to take charge of her disability.

We listened. There were over two hundred women in the audience. Sherry spoke from her heart as she explained the crisis she had confronted just months before; how the anxiety and utter fear had consumed her. She talked about the horror she experienced looking in the mirror and realizing that the almost six-foot tall, emaciated, alien-like image staring back was Sherry Abbott. She talked about how her spirit was terrifyingly crushed when the doctors told her straight out, "You have no chance for survival," and "This cancer will kill you." She was grateful that she was able to summon the courage to reply "How dare you give up on me, when I haven't given up on myself!"

As her talk came to a close, the audience was silent. We had all been carried away to some contemplative place by Sherry's spirited never-say-never attitude. Weeks afterwards I would hear people who heard Sherry speak discussing various points that she had made. They talked about making choices that were right for them. They shared ideas on how to take responsibility for their own situations and challenges. Most importantly, they demonstrated a newfound will to find ways to participate in their own cancer care and healing.

Sherry taught us about learning to nurture the spirit and feed the mind. She helped all of us find a new attitude, gratitude and appreciation for the many ways and possibilities of facing cancer.

Marilyn and Sherry have presented Arts in Medicine workshops, on integrating creativity into whole person care, to both national and international audiences. In addition, they continue to develop new programs and processes that incorporate personal creativity in providing care for anyone living with a chronic disease. Their most recent developments incorporate novel approaches to delivering holistic care as part of a weekend retreat program. For more information you may contact them on their website: artsinmedicine.com, or by e-mail at: 4artsinmedicine@shaw.ca

AFTERWORD

By Sherry Abbott

Sherry Abbott was Director, Public Relations at Revlon Canada when she was diagnosed with ovarian cancer. Today the medical profession enthusiastically proclaims that Sherry's rare form of cancer has been cured.

As a result of her personal experience with cancer, Sherry has been passionately involved with the Look Good Feel Better program sponsored by the Canadian Cosmetic Toiletry and Fragrance Association, and played an instrumental role during the start-up phase of the program in Canada. In 2002, Sherry acted as national spokesperson for the Look Good Feel Better 10th Anniversary Tour across Canada. Today Sherry works to raise funds and awareness in support of women's cancer care.



When I was diagnosed with small-cell ovarian cancer in 1989, I felt totally overwhelmed. Cancer had taken control of my body. My prognosis was dim: a rare disease, few treatment options, and virtually no survivors. Due to the advanced stage of my disease, it was expected that I would only live for a few more

months. My spirit was broken.

As each day passed, I pondered my fate. Perhaps for the first time in my life, I started to see myself as a whole person. With time I realized that in order to survive cancer I would need to summon all of my inner strengths and resources. I needed to quickly find ways to incorporate mind, body and spirit into my healing process.

Creativity was the spark that motivated me on my journey to wellness. Beginning with creative visualization and self-exploration, I began learning the nuance of nurturing my total "self." Creativity was my source of energy and it encouraged me to search out life and all of its riches. It helped me to prioritize those things that were really important to me, the things I wanted to live for.

My cancer experience has taught me many great lessons. I now understand that the human body is as fragile as it is sophisticated, and as resilient as it is intricate. Once our health is compromised, it can take years to get it back. For many of us, healing becomes a lifelong journey. I have learned that we are so much more than just our physical bodies. In harmony and balance, and with a strong connection between our mind, body and spirit, we can all live better, more fulfilling lives. An optimistic, never-say-never attitude makes everything possible. Just believing in ourselves, and each other, is one of the greatest gifts to be shared.

I remain grateful for all of the people who have encouraged and supported me throughout my cancer experience. As I fought for my life, the support I received from such a vast network of caring individuals became my own life-giving force. I am especially grateful that as a result of my cancer experience I have become connected to Marilyn Hundleby. Over the years I have had many enriching experiences thanks to Marilyn's initial invitation to come to the Cross Cancer Institute. Since then we have spoken together at medical conferences, workshops, seminars and retreats. During my visits Marilyn includes me in various group sessions and is always keen for me to meet with patients. A valued aspect of my life has been for me to share my experience with others who have been diagnosed with and are living with cancer.

With Marilyn's professional knowledge and skills, coupled with my personal experience, we do make a good team. We love our work with Arts in Medicine and are always keen to help those who are seeking to take their cancer experience in meaningful new directions.

We felt it was important to create this book to encourage people to embrace the benefits of emotional and spiritual healing. We believe that Arts in Medicine can be a bridge to healing and well being, and that creativity is the catalyst to self-discovery.

If you have an experience with cancer and the art of healing, or wish to share your story or creative image, we would like to hear from you.

Please visit our website at www.artsinmedicine.com

Out beyond safety and the rocks
are new challenges



Tile by Grant (Medical Oncologist)

We all have our stories and the world knows us through our stories. In the hospital, children with cancer, and their parents, tell and retell the details of their medical history to doctors and nurses.

But cancer is only part of their story. What we as medical professionals tend to know about each patient is their illness. What do we really know about the way these illnesses affect their inner being, their life and their soul? And does relating the story of the medical experience contribute to healing of the soul? The stories we hear through these Tile Tales give us a privileged glimpse of the inner person, not just the tumour. Rather than being about cancer, these stories tell us about courage and fear, hope and despair, anger and calm, and perhaps a little bit about ourselves.

*Dr. Paul Grundy
Pediatric Oncologist
Director, Northern Alberta Children's Cancer program*

ARTISTS AND FACILITATORS

None of this work would have been possible were it not for the talents and expertise of the following professional artists and facilitators. These individuals brought their skills as artists, as well as their empathy and compassion for others. We thank each one of you. Your contribution to the Arts in Medicine program has made a difference.

Sherry Abbott
Dr. Susan Baerg
Dr. Anne Bellamy
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Joan Boyarzin
Pat DiMarcello
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Sandi Gold
Lorie Grundy
Judy Hamilton
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Darlene Jones
Ginny Keegan
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Arlene Lack
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Kristene Miller
Joanna Moore
Connie Moores
Elaine Morrison
Barbara Pankratz
Pat Richardson
Brenda Rowe-Bartlett
Maryanna Savaryn
Pearl Schreiner
Lois Schwartz
Shirley A. Serviss
Robert Sinclair
Mary Sullivan Holdgrafer
Lillian Upright
Allan Waidman
Mary Wilton
Mary Wright

"As this colourful, movingly humane and beautiful book demonstrates, art is medicine. Through artistic expression people contact their deepest emotions, fears, hopes, and strengths – they seek themselves, work towards becoming whole. And becoming whole is both the original root meaning and the ultimate goal of healing."

Gabor Maté, M.D.

Author, *When The Body Says No: The Cost of Hidden Stress*

"*Cancer and the Art of Healing* is a book of insight, clarity and hope. Within its pages we encounter the labyrinth of the healing journey, we glimpse images and stories through which the searching heart finds solace, and we discover the many ways that creativity brings wisdom to the wound."

Ross A. Laird, PhD

Author, *Grain of Truth: The Ancient Lessons of Craft*

"*Cancer and the Art of Healing* poignantly illustrates the power of creativity in our lives. This book is sure to inspire and connect you to that inner place where creativity and healing dwell."

Karen Kain

Chair, Canada Council for the Arts
Artistic Director, National Ballet of Canada

"The effect of cancer on individuals is complicated and very profound. While I speak with women who have cancer almost daily, it is still difficult to know what they feel and to understand the impact that cancer has on them. Marilyn and Sherry's book brings together art and the innermost feelings of children and adults who have experienced cancer. This book helps you understand what it is like: the good and the bad of experiencing this disease. Many of the commentaries are hopeful, optimistic and show how individuals value life. Their imagination combined with the therapeutic aspects of creativity make this a powerful book. It encourages you to contemplate your own life and what is really important to you. Congratulations."

Barry Rosen, MD, FRCSC

Head, Division of Gynecologic Oncology
The University of Toronto
Director, The Familial Ovarian Cancer Clinic
Princess Margaret Hospital

"*Cancer and the Art of Healing* is a gift of images and stories shared by people whose lives are touched by cancer and inspired by the knowledge that through sharing their stories and artwork they may also encourage others in similar circumstances.

This beautiful book reveals the power of creativity in helping everyday people heal emotionally and spiritually after a diagnosis and treatment for cancer. It is a signal to all of us that this form of compassionate whole-person care can improve the quality of life for cancer patients and their families. This is leading edge work."

Jean-Michel Turc, MD

President and CEO, Alberta Cancer Board

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